

## Gregory Young and other CalChess kids win at National JHS in Sacramento!

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By NM Michael Aigner



For one weekend, the epicenter of U.S. chess moved west of the Hudson River and ended up at the confluence of the Sacramento and American Rivers. While school children all around the country learn about Sacramento as the western hub of the Pony Express and the Transcontinental Railroad, for just one weekend it was also home to many of the best young chess players in America. Fortunately, the difference between the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that a trip from New York City to Sacramento now takes 6 to 8 hours instead of 6 to 8 days!

Several local coaches had long anticipated the invasion of the nation's top players from New York and other states. They wanted to measure their students up to those representing established names such as Hunter College and I.S. 318. The coaches from California rubbed elbows with their counterparts from the Big Apple: FM Sunil Weeramantry, IM Greg Shahade and WFM Elizabeth Vicary were just three. And while Yankee armada took home more than its fair share of trophies, it is safe to say that the California delegation can hold its head high!

A total of 230 kids from northern California participated in the 2007 National Junior High School Championship on March 30 to April 1, joining a gathering of over 1000 eager youngsters. The CalChess delegation combined for 16 trophies in the two Open sections and many more in the "Under" divisions. The players also brought 23 team trophies home to show off to their school principals and classmates. The largest groups were Joe Lonsdale's teams from Mission San Jose Elementary (plus Hopkins Junior High) in Fremont and Ray Orwig's team from Saint Mark's School in San Rafael. The spirit of U.S. chess is alive and strong in northern California!

By far the most successful participant was **Gregory Young** from San Francisco. As a 6<sup>th</sup> grader, Gregory was one of the younger players in the extremely difficult K-9 section—but he was also one of the top seeds with a 2060 rating. When all of the dust had settled and the results were tabulated, Gregory had finished tied for first place with five older players! His pairings certainly weren't easy because Gregory faced no fewer than four underrated players from New York, including three from Weeramantry's elite Hunter College team. He needed all of his confidence and poise to bounce back from a disappointing round 4 loss to Oregon star Steven Breckenridge, who despite his 1891 rating defeated three of the top six seeds. In the last round, Gregory beat the underrated expert Jared Tan from Los Angeles. When another Los Angeles player, Christian Tanaka (2126) upset the tournament leader Alec Getz (2128) to create a tie for first, it was time to celebrate. *Gregory: you may now call yourself the U.S. Junior High School Champion! Congratulations from your proud coach for a job well done!*

Two other players deserve recognition for placing in the top 25 of the K-9 section. While **Daniel Naroditsky** may have hoped for more than a 5.0 score, 12<sup>th</sup> place in the country is no small feat. That is certainly true when you realize that, as a 5<sup>th</sup> grader, Daniel has another four years to try to win this tournament. The biggest local surprise was **Mukund Chillakanti**, who at 1597 had to defeat two 1850+ and one 1750. Mukund's 18<sup>th</sup> place result is even more remarkable considering that he had to bounce back from an upset loss to an underrated 1448 in round 1!

Most elite northern California juniors played in the 226 player K-8 section. **Rohan Agarwal** (1931) earned the top local score at 5.5/7, defeating a pairing of Arizona players in rounds 5 and 7 to finish strong. The author of these lines recently had personal experience with playing against Rohan's determination and fighting spirit. With the same score as Rohan and in 10<sup>th</sup> place came 3<sup>rd</sup> grader **Kyle Shin**—yes, his grade in school is not a typo! In the last round, Kyle (1675) defeated a player from Arizona who was all of four years older and 200 points higher rated. Kyle's lone defeat in the tournament came at the hands of #1 seed and eventual national champion Marc Tyler Arnold (2333). Kyle's friend and study partner **Nicholas Nip**—also a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader—finished in 18<sup>th</sup> place with 5.0/7. *What do they feed these kids in California that they are so young and yet so good?* The final local trophy winner in K-8 was a child prodigy six years ago, but after a break from chess he was "merely good enough" to get 25<sup>th</sup> place at the nationals. **Steven Zierk** had by far the most difficult pairings this side of Gregory Young—playing in a veritable A section against six opponents rated an average of over 1850 and scoring 5.0/7! Only at the national scholastic championships is it considered normal to see an expert strength player rated 1527 like Steven.

Tournament results: <http://www.alchess.com/chess/07/jhs/?page=STANDINGS&xsection=K9>  
MSA ratings report: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?200704012851.0>

The two strongest sections in the National Junior High School Championship were the K-9 Open and K-8 Open. Trophies were awarded to the top 25 places plus honorable mention to all tied for 25<sup>th</sup>. In addition, there were class prizes for players who did not receive an overall trophy. Team trophies were awarded to the top 25 school teams. May I have a vigorous round of applause for all of these winners? *(For a note to trophy winners who left before the awards ceremony, please read <http://www.uschess.org/tournaments/2007/jhs>)*

K-9 section winners (six tied at 6.0/7, listed in computer tiebreak order): Alec Getz (2128 from NY), Steven Breckenridge (1891 from OR), Gregory Young (2060 from CalChess), Christian Tanaka (2126 from south CA), Michael Yee (1994 from south CA), Grant Ho (1998 from FL).

K-9 team champion: Hunter College from New York City with 21.0.

CalChess winners in K-9:

**Gregory Young (2060)** = tied for 1<sup>st</sup> with 6.0 (3<sup>rd</sup> on tiebreaks)  
**Daniel Naroditsky** (2115) = 12<sup>th</sup> with 5.0  
**Mukund Chillakanti** (1597) = 18<sup>th</sup> with 5.0  
**Jonathan Soo Hoo** (1816) = 26<sup>th</sup> honorable mention with 4.5  
**Charles Sun** (1899) = 33<sup>rd</sup> honorable mention with 4.5  
**Vishal Dasari** (1678) = 37<sup>th</sup> honorable mention with 4.5  
**Jeremy Lowenthal** (1424) = 3<sup>rd</sup> place 1400-1599 with 4.0  
**Challenger School** = 13<sup>th</sup> place team with 8.5  
**Terman Middle School** = 14<sup>th</sup> place team with 6.0  
**Granada School** = 16<sup>th</sup> place team with 5.0

K-8 section champion at perfect 7-0: Marc Tyler Arnold (2333 from NY).

K-8 team champion: NY I.S. 318 from Brooklyn, NY with 19.5.

CalChess winners in K-8:

**Rohan Agarwal** (1931) = 9<sup>th</sup> place with 5.5  
**Kyle Shin** (1675) = 10<sup>th</sup> place with 5.5  
**Nicholas Nip** (1957) = 18<sup>th</sup> place with 5.0  
**Steven Zierk** (1527) = 25<sup>th</sup> place with 5.0  
**Arthur Liou** (1814) = 27<sup>th</sup> honorable mention with 5.0  
**Yian Liou** (1637) = 33<sup>rd</sup> honorable mention with 5.0  
**Isaac Zhang** (1765) = 34<sup>th</sup> honorable mention with 5.0  
**Puneeth Gadangi** (1413) = 2<sup>nd</sup> place 1400-1599 with 4.5  
**Hemang Jangle** (1395) = 2<sup>nd</sup> place 1200-1399 with 4.0  
**Hopkins Junior High** = 3<sup>rd</sup> place team with 17.0  
**Mission San Jose Elementary** = 8<sup>th</sup> place team with 14.5  
**Redwood Middle School** = 14<sup>th</sup> place team with 12.0  
**Fisher Middle School** = 17<sup>th</sup> place team with 11.0  
**Valley Oak Elementary** = 23<sup>rd</sup> place with 9.0

For many schools, the focus of chess is a fun after school activity that stimulates the minds of young players. These schools are not competitive enough for the Open sections. Fortunately, the Junior High Nationals had three "Under" divisions and one "Unrated" section. The following northern California schools should be proud to have received trophies in the top 15 of their sections. Congratulations!

**Saint Mark's School** = 7<sup>th</sup> place team in K-9 U1250  
**Mission San Jose Elementary** = 7<sup>th</sup> place team in K-8 U1000  
**Marin Country Day School** = 12<sup>th</sup> place team in K-8 U1000  
**St. Alban's Country Day School** = 13<sup>th</sup> place team in K-8 U1000  
**Art Freiler School** = 9<sup>th</sup> place team in K-8 U750  
**Mission San Jose Elementary** = 12<sup>th</sup> place team in K-8 U750  
**Granada School** = 14<sup>th</sup> place team in K-8 U750  
**Jackman Middle School** = 15<sup>th</sup> place team in K-8 U750  
**Corning Unified** = 6<sup>th</sup> place team in K-9 Unrated  
**Biggs Unified** = 9<sup>th</sup> place team in K-9 Unrated  
**Sierra View School** = 11<sup>th</sup> place team in K-9 Unrated  
**Franklin School** = 12<sup>th</sup> place team in K-9 Unrated

**Fern Bacon Middle School** = 13<sup>th</sup> place team in K-9 Unrated  
**Granada School** = 14<sup>th</sup> place team in K-9 Unrated  
**Mission San Jose Elementary** = 15<sup>th</sup> place team in K-9 Unrated

One characteristic of a national championship is the incredibly challenging pairings. It is a simple fact that people will not fly in from around the country just to lose! A supermajority of the players in the tournament is underrated, many by several hundred points. While 400 rating point upsets are rare in local events (both adult and scholastic), they seem to almost be the norm at a national championship. It is perfectly natural for the higher rated players to lose a few rating points simply because of the difficulty of competition. Even out of the six co-champions in the K-9 section, only one gained more than 8 rating points. To all those parents and children out there in shock at the rating points they lost, do not lose hope: If you're truly good, you will gain the points back soon enough at other tournaments.

On behalf of all of the players, parents and coaches, I would like to extend words of appreciation to the directors and volunteers who worked at this tournament. Having attended half a dozen scholastic nationals over the past few years, I can safely say that this event was the most smoothly run that I have seen. Much of the credit goes to the professional staff of National and Senior TD's who fly in from around the country just for the privilege of spending a weekend indoors with a thousand kids—all the while paid either a meager sum or merely their expenses. Some local directors contributed all weekend as well, including **John McCumiskey**, **Richard Koepcke**, **Tom Langland**, **Arthur Braden**, **Salman Azhar** and **Bob Baker**. Thank you to all who made the Nationals a weekend to remember!

Finally, this author would like to publish a PGN file of games from this tournament. If you or your child played a game worth showing, please send email to [fpawn@calchess.org](mailto:fpawn@calchess.org) and attach the games in either PGN or CBV format.



**Gregory Young with coach NM Michael Aigner**

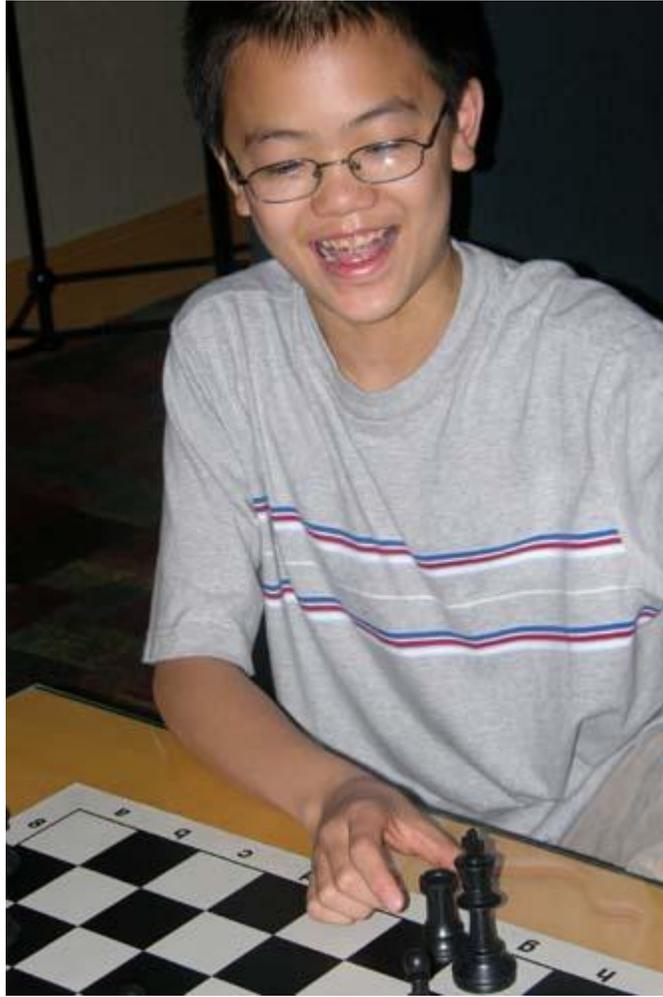


Photo by Richard Shorman