

Berkeley International Kicks off the New Year

January 1, 2011
by IM David Pruess

2011 will kick off immediately with what may be the best week of broadcast chess entertainment of the year. Starting with two three-hour broadcasts on January second, the entire 10-round [4th Berkeley International Chess Tournament](#) will have live streaming video coverage. This tournament promises to be one of the most exciting of the year in the U.S., with an incredible all-star field (more on that below), and the broadcasts themselves should be an extremely exciting product, with a set of terrific guest hosts (more on them below), fast-paced coverage of a host of exciting games, post-game interviews with the players, with their thoughts on their game, and the competition. Most likely, few people will be free to watch every single show live, so all broadcasts will also be saved and available to those buying the coverage package to be viewed (and re-viewed) later at their convenience.

First let me present the format of the event:

It is a 10-round swiss system with about 60 players. The players compete for a prize fund of 7,500 U.S.D. with the basic chess scoring system of 1 point for a win, 1/2 point for a draw, and shame for a loss. There will be another very important competition going on at the same time as the competition for prizes: the fight for norms. There are not many tournaments in the U.S. where players have a chance to compete for title norms, because norms must be earned against an international field. The Berkeley International has over 20 foreigners and 10 International Grandmasters, making it a great opportunity for contestants to work towards International Master or International Grandmaster Titles.

Next, consider the exciting field:

GM Loek van Wely: won the Dutch Championship 6 years in a row, and is a former member of the world top 10. Recently he has started competing in some of the U.S.'s monster swisses, winning for example the 2010 Chicago Open.



GM Timur Gareev: became a Grandmaster at age 16, and has tied for first in the Uzbek national championship. Since becoming a student at University of Texas Brownsville, he has a number of smashing American successes to his name, like the 2009 and 2010 Copperstate Internationals and the 2010 National Open. An unfettered and imaginative player, Timur is a definite candidate for brilliancy prizes as well as tournament victories.



GM Robert Hess: Hess has fulfilled essentially every accomplishment a young player in this country could hope to achieve and much more, in particular, his completely stunning tie for second place in the 2009 US Championship. A player who tends to be very difficult for first timers to face off against, with the majority of his GM competitors here being of non-US descent, his mysteriousness could end up paying dividends against this tough field.

GM Sergey Erenburg: The Israeli GM has studied at UMBC for the past five years, and is mostly known in the U.S. for his incredible play in the US Chess League as top gun for the Baltimore Kingfishers. As his studies keep him too busy to compete in many American events, eschewing most aside from the Pan American Collegiate Championships, this will be one of the very few major events where he can be seen in action.



GM Davorin Kuljasevic: Originally from Croatia, he has studied in the US for the last five years, just recently completing the requirements for his GM title. Though he doesn't tend to compete in many American Tournaments either, he showed his mettle by leading the Dallas Destiny to US Chess League Championships in both 2007 and 2008, and is a very solid player who is tough for anyone to beat.

GM Magesh Panchanathan: Another UTD graduate, Magesh has several impressive tournament wins in the US, including tying for first in the 2006 World Open. While much of his time is taken up by teaching these days, he is a very dangerous player who, when he hits a good stride, can win almost any tournament.



GM Dejan Bojkov: He has won the Bulgarian National Championship, and will be kicking off his first American campaign at the Berkeley International. He is also a gifted chess writer, with an exceptional blog, and a variety of online lessons through chess.com.

GM Jesse Kraai: While Jesse can be the life of any party, his skills on the board can never be underestimated. While his slow, patient style can often confound those who feel that it doesn't match his personality, he certainly makes it work, including a great performance at the 2010 US Championship, where he was within striking distance of making the final four quad.



GM Josh Friedel: Affectionately nicknamed "The Panda", the playful attitude he shows on his weekly chess.com/tv program should not fool anyone as to his strength, as he has finished in the Top 10 in the US Championship several times. Recent winner of the American Open and having won the North American Open in 2009, it seems these winter months may be when he hits his stride which will make him someone to watch out for in this event.

GM Anatoly Bykhovsky: A complete newcomer to the US Chess Scene having only moved here in August to attend Texas Tech, Bykhovsky showed in his first major tournament, the Spice Cup, that he's someone to watch out for, tying for first place in a very tough field.



IM Sam Shankland: has two Grandmaster norms, and has reached a 2500 rating before. After missing out on his final GM norm on a couple of technicalities, his priority will be to try to get that last qualification he needs to become a GM. He has proven time and again that he is of GM level now, tying for first in the world under 18 championships, and leading the Nor'Easters (on first board, against a host of top Grandmasters) to the 2010 US Chess League Championship.

IM Lev Milman: While life on Wall Street keeps Milman's chess activity to a minimum, he can not be discounted, having had so many great finishes and having beaten so many strong players over the years. He has been painfully close to receiving his GM title several times, having two norms for a long time, but having missed the third by the narrowest of margins several times and would certainly love to finish the title in Berkeley.

IM Siddharth Ravichandran: A relative newcomer to US chess, Ravichandran has competed in many US events and displayed several very strong finishes, nearly making a GM norm at the 2010 Copper State International. Despite having just completed his IM title, his current strength probably encourages him to immediately aim for the GM upgrade.

IM Sam Collins: As first board for the Irish team, he caused a stir at the 2010 Olympiad when he drew with GM Grischuk in the first round. He subsequently narrowly missed his third and final GM norm, and will surely be aiming for it at this event.

FM Daniel Naroditsky: Daniel has a sufficient fide rating to already be an IM, he just needs to earn another norm. But at his level, he will probably just aim higher than that in every tournament he plays now, and the norm will fall into place while he heads towards Grandmaster. Daniel has won the world under 12 championships, and has already written an excellent textbook on positional chess.

FM Darwin Yang: The nation's highest rated 13-year old has two IM norms, and is looking in great shape as he quests to complete the title. He earned a second norm at the SPICE Cup in October, and should continue his streak in Berkeley.

IM Steven Zierk: Steven shocked everyone in the world when he earned his IM title... by winning the world under 18 championships in 2010! Since then, expectations for this young man have skyrocketed, with some rumors that he intends to become a GM by the time he graduates high school in June. Well, he'll have to make a GM norm in Berkeley if he hopes to achieve that goal.

IM Daniel Rensch: Recently-turned-IM, but not sated, Rensch ambitiously aims to gradually improve his game until he becomes a GM, despite contributing most of his time and energy to the greater chess community through his job as Director of Content and Professional Relations at chess.com.

IM David Pruess: co-organizer of the tournament, writer of this advertisement, and referring to himself in the third person, IM Pruess has no illusions about winning the tournament or becoming a GM, but expects that many chess fans will be interested to see some of the sharp games he will produce at the tournament. He will try to compete for the brilliancy prize.

WFM Tatev Abrahamyan: Undisputedly one of the strongest female chess-players in the country, Abrahamyan has shown marked improvement over the past year. She scored her first IM norm at the 2010 Chicago Open and followed up by tying for second in the 2010 US Women's Championship with an incredible seven and a half out of nine. Though easily much stronger than her title would suggest, Abrahamyan's current goal is the IM title, not bothering to apply for the women's titles (WIM, WGM) that she feels are unimportant.

NM Yian Liou: at 13, he is one of the nation's top young talents, having taken first place in the U.S. Cadet (under 16) championships this past summer. Yian is in very close striking distance of making the Fide Master title, and has a fair chance to make the rating points he needs at this tournament, though he will have to balance it with his first week of school!

NM Kayden Troff: he caused a sensation when he almost won the world u12 championships in Greece in October, finishing second. His sudden rapid rise in strength has people watching to see if he is ready to make an IM norm.

NM Daniel Gurevich: like Kayden, at only twelve years old, Daniel is showing signs in his recent results that he may already be prepared to work on the jump from NM to IM.

There are too many terrific players for me to list every single one. I may have missed your favorite! In which case, I apologize. [Check here](#) to see *all* participants.

And our also-very-exciting lineup of hosts for the broadcasts:

Greg Shahade is an international master, and the most innovative chess organizer in the United States over the past decade, founding the New York Masters tournaments, the US Chess League, and the US Chess School.

Jay is co-founder and CTO of chess.com, the coder who built the majority of the pages you use on the site every day, and an avid chess fan.

Roger Poehlman is a national master and renowned local chess teacher for the Berkeley Chess School. He will himself be playing some rounds to keep the number of players even.

Vinay Bhat is an International Grandmaster and former columnist for chess.com. As a winner of the Samford Fellowship, he spent two years traveling the world as a chess professional.

Erik is cofounder and CEO of chess.com, whose love of chess lead him to envision the most expansive chess site in the world with social networking and myriad learning tools.

The round times (in pacific) are:

January 2nd: 11 am & 6 pm

January 3rd: 11 am & 6 pm

January 4th: 11 am & 6 pm

January 5th: 4 pm

January 6th: 4 pm

January 7th: 11 am

January 8th: 10 am

For each round, the live broadcast will start 1:15 into the round, and go for at least three hours. This is over 30 hours of exciting chess coverage, with celebrity hosts, and chess stars stopping in to give you their candid thoughts in the heat of battle, and answer your questions. For a package price of 40\$, this is about 1\$ per hour! To purchase the full coverage package, transfer by paypal to the tournament organizer, Arun Sharma. (use the address asharmaATmathDOTberkeleyDOTedu).

The first round will be shown at www.chess.com/tv for ANYONE. To watch you do not need to purchase the package, or have a premium chess.com membership. Just go to the url and enjoy. Then pick up your computer, dial www.paypal.com, and buy the package to watch the rest of the show! Hurry, as the number of viewers for the broadcasts of rounds 2-10 is strictly limited.

Of course, if you are lucky enough to live within the Bay Area, you are welcome to come down and watch live at the [Berkeley Chess School](#).

If, as we sincerely hope, this coverage is a great success, we will try to bring it to a selection of the most exciting chess events of the year around the country. Any tournament organizer reading this, please get in touch with David Pruess if you are anxious to get this organized for your event.