

CalChess Girl Power at All-Girls Nationals

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by Alan Kirshner

The United States Chess Federation held the 2013 All-Girls Nationals in Chicago during the weekend of April 26 through the 28. The Kasparov Chess Federation sponsored the tournament that drew 280 girls from all over the nation. The Renaissance Knights Chess Federation of Illinois organized the record-breaking event. Garry Kasparov, former World Chess Champion and human rights activist, came from his home in Russia to sign his books and be photographed with all the individual and team trophy winners. A number of girls from the NorCal competed and made their mark in the history book of this decade old event. Weibel Elementary School of Fremont was the only CalChess school to send a team. It is easy to write that 100% of the CalChess teams that competed became national champions.

Sisters from San Jose rocked the stage. They likely created a new footnote in the annals of all the national championships—two siblings winning national championships at the same event. Aksithi Eswaran won the under 8 section with 5.5 points out of a possible 6. Her only draw came against a fellow CalChess girl from Fremont, Annapoorni Meiyappan. Both Annapoorni and Aksithi are this year's Girls State Champions. Aksithi in the K-1 grade section and Annapoorni in the 2-3 grade section. Both these very young girls have a great future ahead of them in chess. Aksithi's sister, Ashritha Eswaran (rated 2011), overwhelmed the under 14 division going undefeated. Aksithi now gets to fulfill another dream, I understand, to compete in the World Youth Championships at the same time as her sister. Winners of the Nationals automatically qualify for the U.S. Team to the World Youth Championships in the United Arab Emirates in the Fall.



Aksithi Eswaran



Chenyi Zhao

In the under 10 section two CalChess girls from Fremont, wearing bright red NorCal House of Chess T-shirts, brought trophies home. Chenyi Zhao (1580, by far the top girl player in CalChess in her age category, tied for second. She only lost to her Club teammate, Antara Garai. Antara tied for eighth. Sadly, the organizers only awarded 15 place trophies. I say sadly, because Hiya Ghosh of Cupertino, who also is a member of the NorCal House of Chess and plays at Weibel, tied for 11th place and did not obtain a trophy because her tie-breaks put her at 18th.

Years ago when a similar injustice occurred to one of my sons at the Nationals I decided to provide extra tie-break trophies to distribute at the announced lowest trophy award no matter how many I needed to give out. One year when I was running the CalChess State Scholastics this cost me an extra 35 trophies in one division alone.

In recent years, the Spring Nationals have followed my lead. I wish I had realized that the trophies would be cut off at 15 when I attended the scholastic coaches meeting on Sunday. I would have pointed out the unfairness of this policy. I am sure it will be changed next year, when I write them, as the organizers of this event seem to be very reasonable people. One other CalChess girl from Fremont played in the under 10 section finishing a respectable 22nd out of 72 competitors, Kavya Sasikumar. I could tell she was enjoying herself when she smiled for my camera.

In the under 12 section, Simona Nayberg, of San Francisco and the grade 4 to 6 2013 CalChess State Girl's Champion, tied for eighth place. Two Weibel girls joined her in that tie—Desiree Ho and Serafina Show. Among the other CalChess girls in this division were Trina Chatterjee, Anvi Surapaneni, Sara Kaushik and Rini Vasan. All of these girls had respectable results winning at least half their games.

The under 14 section had only one other girl from CalChess besides Ashritha Eswaran who, as I noted earlier, won the section. Veronica Show was that other girl. She recently returned to chess after a three year hiatus doing Synchronized Swimming, to join her sister Serafina at the Nationals and won half her games.

CalChess had no representatives in the under 16 section. Alekhya Nandula from Cupertino tied for second in the under 18 section. The U.S.C.F. added an under 20 section this year. While there were no under 20 representatives in this new division, I realized on the way home that my secretary could have provided CalChess with at least one competitor. She said she definitely would have gone. And yes, she is good enough to have received a trophy. Oh, well!



Ashritha Eswaran

Now for the one CalChess team at the All-Girls Nationals: Weibel Elementary School is known nationally for its exceptional chess program. Weibel teams have won a section or more at the California Chess Girls State Championship every year since its inception. In 2011 Weibel's teams won both the 8 and under as well as the 10 and under divisions of the All-Girls Nationals. Note: this year the U.S.C.F. changed the age and under to under the age. Weibel entered seeded third in the newly designated under 12 section behind strong teams from Intermediate School 318 of New York and Bull Run Elementary School of Virginia. Both teams won sections of the All-Girls Nationals in 2012. Weibel finished second to Bull Run in 2012 in the under 10 section. IS 318 was the subject of an award winning documentary last year titled "Brooklyn Castle." The film highlighted how IS 318, an inner city school, successfully incorporated chess in its curriculum and in its culture.



Under 12 team champs
Weibel Elementary School

The girls played six games of chess over a period of three days. Each game can last as long as three hours and 15 minutes. Yes, the Nationals are often an endurance competition along with chess. The tournament started Friday night with the Mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emmanuel, welcoming all the players to his city. Round one followed the Opening Ceremonies. For the first three rounds the three top teams remained tied for first place. After round four the scoreboard showed Weibel in the lead by one point. The Weibel girls knew they would have a tough fifth round as they would have to play very strong opponents. While the Weibel girls lost all but one of their games, the players from the other top teams did not fair much better. At the end of the fifth round all three teams were once again tied for first place. The Weibel girls spirit remained high. Ted Castro owner of the NorCal House of Chess in Fremont and a chess teacher, who the Weibel girls affectionately call “Teddy Bear,” appeared unannounced at our team room--a large suite one of the Weibel parents, with her usual kindness,

provided the players. Ted had decided to fly to Chicago not only to help the Weibel girls, but also to cheer on his other students from the Bay Area. I believe Ted Castro, through his NorCal House of Chess has worked with all but two of the Bay Area girls that attended the Nationals. He has become known as “Teddy Bear, The Trainer of Champions.”

Dr. Alan Kirshner, the Weibel Team Coach, gave a hard hitting and moving “locker room” talk to the girls as they went into the sixth and final round. The Weibel girls left the team room energetic and confident of victory. Serafina Show, Weibel’s top ranked player, was facing a player from IS 318. Her victory there would assure Weibel of at least a second place. Serafina, with her usual joie de vivre, bounced into the Team Room to announce her victory. Behind her was our second rated player, Desiree Ho, also smiling broadly. Hugs abounded. Now we had to await the final results. One of the Weibel parents did some reconnoitering and announced victory. The cheers went up and cartwheels appeared. Dr. Kirshner asked the parents what their impression of the upset victory was and they exclaimed almost in unison: “Unreal!” The Weibel girls who created this successful outcome were: Serafina Show (5th grade), Desiree Ho (6th grade), Sara Kaushik (6th grade) and Anvi Surapaneni (4th grade). Serafina and Desiree also won individual trophies.

This upset victory increased Weibel’s victories at chess nationals to five. All have occurred in the last three years. Added to the other national titles mentioned earlier, Weibel won the Primary School Nationals in 2010 and the Elementary School Nationals in 2012. Weibel has the distinction of having won more chess national titles than any other school in California. In my book, that is also unreal. Hopefully, next year CalChess will see a few more school teams at the All-Girls Nationals.

Chess is Forever,
Alan
Alan M. Kirshner, Ph.D.