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## INTRODUCTION

Season's Greetings, family and friends of the New Britain Chess Club:

Howdy, all! I hope that you and your family are healthy and happy. I am pleased to report that I am doing quite well this holiday season.

Once again, we gather to celebrate this festive time of the year. I especially enjoy the Christmas holiday at the club, where we join hands in the spirit of the season and when I reminisce about the special moments that defined and had an indelible impact on our club in the last twelve months.

Our organization continues to progress on so many levels, and I am proud to report to the Connecticut state community that we provide so much for the benefit of our members.

Since 2005, I have enjoyed writing and preserving the most memorable times that have occurred at the club, along with recognizing our members who have achieved exceptional milestones. It is hard to believe that this year marks the twentieth annual publication of the club newsletters. Wow! Time has certainly flown!

With that friends, I hope that you take a few hours out of your busy holiday schedule and read about all of the exciting and amazing club adventures and events and membership achievements that happened in 2024. As always, I appreciate your feedback, input, and support.

**“WHEN YOU'RE LONELY, WHEN YOU FEEL YOURSELF AN  
ALIEN IN THE WORLD, PLAY CHESS. THIS WILL RAISE  
YOUR SPIRITS AND BE YOUR COUNSELOR IN WAR.”**

Aristotle

# **THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR**

## **JANUARY**

The NBCC commenced 2024 on January 2 with a qualifying event for its annual championship. The preliminary part of this heritage event was the first held in many years. The rules, as outlined by directors Mark Bourque and USCF NM Suhas Kodali, stated that only players rated under 1600 were allowed to compete in the qualifier, with the top scorer in the Swiss automatically advancing to the championship section. After the completion of the qualifier, because of some confusion regarding the qualifiers, the top four players were ultimately allowed to advance to the top section.

## **FEBRUARY**

On Saturday, February 17, a few light snow showers and a winter chill in the air in the quaint little town of Parsippany, New Jersey, set the stage for some serious but spirited chess action at the largest team tournament in the history of chess – the annual World/U.S. Amateur Team East Chess Championship (USATE). Since the early 1970s, this heritage, three-day chess retreat has attracted players of all ages and levels from around the country and even abroad. Mr. E. Steven Doyle, who is one of the most experienced (50 years!), amiable, and devoted chess organizers in the world, was the chief organizer and director of USATE. He and his professional staff did a phenomenal job in coordinating all aspects of this grand chess competition, which took months to plan. On behalf of the NBCC and the Connecticut chess community, thank you, Mr. Doyle, and your crew for making everyone feel like one big chess family, where players reconnect with each other and where new friendships are built.

Each year since 2007, the NBCC has fielded at least one team to this incredible event. This year, the club was fortunate to recruit three four-player teams for a total of twelve members past or present. On the first team, We Got Out of Perpetual Belicheck, we had veteran USATE players FM Richard Bauer, USCF NM Derek Meredith, Doug Fiske, and Joe Bihlmeyer. As a team, they ended up with four match points and won the title of Top Connecticut Team on tie-breaks over the club's second team, which I will mention shortly. The Belicheck team faced strong competition throughout the tournament, and there were many close, nail-biting games.

This team was also nominated for the Best Team name but unfortunately did not receive enough claps from the audience to win the coveted prize. Better luck next year! On the second team, Pawn Solo & Chewbacca the Rook, we also had veteran USATE players USCF NM James Nitz, Norman Burtness, Mike Pascetta, and John Nitz. It was nice to see a father and a son play on the same team. The Pawn Solo team, like the Belicheck team, also scored 4-2. In essence, we had two NBCC teams tie for Top Connecticut Team performances at USATE, a first in club history. Talk about being historic! This just proves how strong our club really is! It should be noted that this team performed very well despite having to deal with some challenging lower-rated players. Finally, Bob Cyr was grateful to form his own NBCC team, New Britain Chess Club's Greatest Name in History (how cool!), with USATE newcomers Kashvi Madhwani, Krystian Tkaczewski Jr., and David Fusco (our club's newest photographer). Despite having to play up in nearly every round, Bob's fellow teammates had a wonderful experience. Even though Bob went scoreless on board one, having to face class A and expert players in four of six rounds, his team overall did well with two match points. Especially impressive was Krystian's nicking of a draw against a player rated over 1900! Bob was so thrilled to develop a friendship with David, whom he drove down with, whom he shared a hotel room with, and whom he dined with (and others) during the three-day event.

There were other members, like USCF NM Jordan Groff and Lacey Wang, who competed on mixed state teams. It was nice to see them as well.

Well, friends, USATE 2024 is officially in the history books. I hope that next year, we can get even more teams from the club to play in this awesome tournament. USATE is truly the holy grail of chess. This was my eleventh USATE experience, and it was a memorable one. USATE is a unique event that all chess players should put on their bucket list. Until next Presidents Day in Parsippany, New Jersey, folks, this is Bob Cyr signing off and wishing you a happy and healthy year.

## **MARCH**

After leaving the national stage at USATE, we went back to highlights at the NBCC with the conclusion of our annual championship, a heritage event with records dating back to the 1930s. Spanning ten weeks (two weeks missed because of snowstorms and one week missed to allow a mental rest for players from the club who participated at USATE), the championship event of 2024 was truly one for the history books.

There were many extreme battles and close matches, just like in the NCAA Men's and Women's Basketball Tournament. The fifty-three players (perhaps an attendance record for this event) gave it their all in this exciting, entertaining, exhilarating, and, at times, exhausting tournament. In the end, though, USCF NM Jordan Groff and USCF NM Derek Meredith tied for first place in the championship section. Instead of using conventional or play-off tie-breaks, these gentlemen agreed to share first place equally as co-champions, probably the first time there were co-champions in any major club event. Daniel Knowles, who returned to chess after five decades, won the reserves (candidates) section. This was his first major tournament win in the club, and he is only the second unrated person to win a major event at the club (the first was USCF NM Dennis Prawira back in 2007). We owe our esteemed gratitude to Mark Bourque, who had assistance from USCF NM Suhas Kodali, for directing the tournament and dealing with the Caissa pairing software company when difficulties were encountered when submitting the tournament for rating. They both went above and beyond the call of their duties as tournament directors. Way to go! Also, thanks to Roger Bessette for helping with on-site registrations on the first night of the tournament in Mark's absence.

A week after becoming co-club champions, USCF NM Jordan Groff and USCF NM Derek Meredith reviewed their drawn game from the club championship during their lecture. It was a very insightful, interesting, and intriguing class. After that, they gave a joint simultaneous chess exhibition, a first in club history. They started at separate boards across from each other and proceeded with making moves around the tables. The masters allowed between zero and three passes (using envelopes as the passes!) for each participant based on ratings. In essence, some players like the youngest of the kids got three passes, and those highest rated (yes, we know you, Mashkov, got no passes!). The NBCC simul of 2024 was the shortest (about 2.5 hours) ever at the club (obviously, because we had two masters). Members defeating the masters were Yonatan Axelrad, Jack Qian, Krystian Tkaczewski, Jr., and Aryan Jangle. Draws were earned by Roger Bessette and David Mashkov. Twenty-four players of all ages and levels (up to class A) competed in the simul. Thanks to Jordan and Derek for hosting this fun activity at the club.

Before we leave the month of March, there is one more highlight that occurred at the club that I really want to share with you fine people. For over a decade now, the club has held rated blitz chess tournaments in between our club's classical time-controlled tournaments, except for two unrated. That is ok for historical purposes. Most of these events have been won by masters or very high-ranked expert players. For our fortieth event, which attracted almost forty players (thirty-nine – if only Bob had played, it would have been forty – darn, Bob!), the underdogs gave it their all, putting the full-court pressure on the top guns. In the end, three of our esteemed players, NBCC Vice President Justin Lalor (an expert), Lacey Wang, and Senthil Paramasivan tied for first place. Both Lacey and Senthil are class chess players. Way to go, guys! We now officially end the month of March.

## APRIL

Last year, the club hosted its first Winner's Keepers event, where the winners of each section had their names immortalized for this year's tournament. The winners of last year's event were Mark Bourque, David Mashkov, and Krystian Tkaczewski, Jr., so these players had this year's event named after them. After four rounds of spirited and lively competition, the following players won the Bourque – Mashkov – Tkaczewski Jr. Chess Tournament: Mark Bourque (Open section), Luca Festa (U1800 section), and Benjamin Fields (U1200 section). It should be noted for the record that Mark becomes the fourth player in club history to win or tie for first place in his own tournament. And we should also recognize both Luca and Benjamin, new members, for winning their first major tournament in the club. Congratulations, superstars!

On April 30, the club organized a memorial rated blitz chess tournament for Joseph Mansigian, who passed away earlier in the month. Bob Cyr wrote a very touching eulogy for Joseph, which is published later in this newsletter and which he read before the tournament commenced. Many of Joseph's longtime friends attended. In all, over thirty people came to pay their respects to one of the most legendary and kind people in our chess community. Thanks to USCF NM Suhas Kodali for hosting and directing this seven-round tournament. After a night of blitz fun, USCF NM David Herscovici, Suhas Kodali, and Mark Bourque shared first place in the Joseph Mansigian Memorial.

## MAY

Periodically, the club has received donations of books from members past and present. During the month of May, one of our club's dearest friends, Tom Zissu, donated some rare chess books. We thank him for his lovely contributions.

During all of May and in the second week of June, the club held its third major tournament of the year – the annual Strazdins Cup / Stein – in honor of two of the greatest contributors to and advocates for the club, Arkadijs and Andris Strazdins. The Arkadijs Strazdins Cup started in 2007, and the Andris Strazdins Stein started in 2016. Throughout the competition, which attracted forty-four players, we saw many spirited battles and a few major upsets, some almost near a 500-point difference. We continue to see the rise of players like Yonatan Axelrad, David Mashkov, and David Fusco, all of whom had major upsets in this tournament. In the event, two players emerged victorious, each winning the gold with undefeated performances in the five-round Swiss event. USCF NM Jordan Groff and Central Connecticut State University Chess Club President Ian Wohlhieter clinched first place in the Strazdins Cup and Strazdins Stein sections, respectively, and each were presented with a rotating trophy along with a cash prize. A very special thanks to Roger Bessette, who has been a tremendous help to me and to the club for his role as assistant tournament director and historian. I treated Roger to dinner as a token of my appreciation. Way to go, Roger! You are an asset and a loyal, devoted friend to the club.

## JUNE

In June, the club has historically held its annual business meeting to discuss its operational and financial health over the last year. At this meeting, officer elections are also held. Lastly, new business is slated on the agenda. This year, the meeting was held on the first week of June instead of on the second week because some of the club's officials had scheduling conflicts. The June 4 meeting started promptly at 7:15 p.m. and lasted until 8:45 p.m. Twenty-five members, including an appearance from Connecticut State Chess Association President Alexander Lumelsky, were in attendance.

The meeting commenced with the review of the 2023 NBCC business meeting minutes. After a brief deliberation, the members approved it.

NBCC Historian Bob Cyr then gave his report. He covered the major highlights of the year, mentioned the various best game and grand prix contests, and spoke about the publication of the 20<sup>th</sup> club newsletter.

NBCC President USCF NM Suhas Kodali next gave his report. First, he acknowledged and thanked Estee Axelrad for her continued efforts in opening the club every Tuesday. Suhas also expressed his gratitude to USCF NM David Herscovici, Roger Bessette, and Joe Miglizzi for their help to close the club every Tuesday. The tournament directors were also thanked for their service to the club. Suhas then highlighted the success of last year's New Britain Summer Open Chess Championship and briefly explained why the Planet Earth Chess Championship was not held this year. The club president mentioned the significant increase in scholastic membership. Specifically, the scholastic training lessons have encouraged younger players to join the club. Finally, Suhas thanked Justin Lalor for his hard work and devotion in implementing our club's non-profit status.

NBCC Vice President Justin Lalor then gave his report. He showed the current club by-laws and answered questions from members. Justin said that he offered to file the required tax documents and forms to comply with the 501(c)(3) status. He also reminded the audience that donations to the club are now deductible in accordance with IRS regulations.

NBCC Treasurer USCF NM David Herscovici followed with his report. David mentioned the positive change in the unrestricted net worth for the club as a good sign of financial health. He pointed out that the club generated healthy profits from the Summer Open and the NBCC Championship. David informed the members about the prompt rent payments until December 2024 to our landlord. Lastly, a moment of silence was held for Joe Mansigian, a former lifetime club member, who passed away earlier this year.

After the reports from Bob and the board of directors, the election of club officers for the September 1, 2024 – August 31, 2025 fiscal year took place. All four of the officers were unanimously re-elected to their respective club positions.

The last segment of the meeting was devoted to new business. During this portion of the meeting, the following ideas were brought forth by the membership:

- David explained to the members the details of the upcoming rental agreement with the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection. He answered questions from the membership, who agreed to the new rental agreement.
- A recommendation to create a TD committee to discuss and solve members' requests and tournament situations was approved by the members. Suhas asked for six volunteers to be part of this TD committee: Estee Axelrad, Roger Bessette, Mark Bourque, USCF NM Derek Meredith, Ian Wohlhieter, and FM Richard Bauer.
- Members discussed the possibility to start the tournament games before 7:00 p.m. in order to finish earlier. This would help the scholastic players. After an exchange of comments and a brief survey, members agreed to start promptly at 7:00 p.m. and to not compromise the chess lectures.
- Members discussed the possibility to give an incentive to the volunteers who open and close the club. The members recommended a free tournament entry.
- Suhas expressed his recommendation to maintain the current membership dues next year due to the healthy financial situation of the club. The members agreed with his motion.
- A discussion about the posting of club member photos on social media, on the NBCC website, and on Instagram took place. Suhas asked the members if we should ask permission from the members before posting any photos. A suggestion to include a disclaimer on the annual membership application was recommended.
- Norman Burtness expressed his dissatisfaction when playing opponents during a tournament who are way below his rating. After a few comments from the members, Suhas suggested that the newly formed TD committee should decide on this request.

- Mark expressed his concerns when an ill player (especially a kid) decides to play at the club and potentially transmit a disease to other members. After an exchange among the members, Suhas delegated this topic to be discussed by the TD committee.
- Rick expressed his concern about the potential shortage of certified TDs at the club due to the new USCF certification requirements. A lively discussion among the members took place. A motion to certify more directors was raised by Derek. A positive response from a few members helped to identify potential TDs for the near future.

After the Strazdins Cup – Stein, a new tournament was held at the club. The ideas for this event, the NBCC Generations Championship – where players were placed into sections based on age – were created by FM Richard Bauer. The creative and cool names for the sections (Out of Time – 50 or older; Prime Time – 18 to 49; Play Time – under 18) were drafted by USCF NM Derek Meredith. We had a very fine turnout for this inaugural event, with close to forty-five players competing. There were different time controls in each section, with the fastest time control for the youths and the slower time control for the seniors. After three weeks of spirited and entertaining competition, the first NBCC Generation Champions were crowned. The winners were Rick Bauer (Out of Time), USCF NM Jordan Groff (Prime Time), and Yonatan Axelrad (Play Time).

In addition to keeping track of the club archives, I also monitor the membership totals throughout the years. The record for membership in our club in one year occurred in 1973, during the Fischer boom, when we had 119 members. Since then, the club has reached 100 members or higher in four fiscal years. And now, we made it to number five, when the club attained a membership of 102 at the end of June this year. I am not certain if the club membership record can be broken by the end of August, but you never know! I thank USCF NM David Herscovici for providing me access to the club membership roster for these statistical updates.

## JULY

In July, for many years now, the club has held its annual knockout and Swiss tournament. The tournament ideas were created by FM Nelson Castaneda, and, except for this year due to a busy life schedule, he has directed this tournament.

Replacing Nelson in the capacity as TD this year was USCF NM Suhas Kodali. It should be noted that Bob Cyr helped Suhas out with the registrations prior to the start of round one. The rules for this event that Nelson proposed are simple. Only the top sixteen rated players who committed to playing in the knockout event were grouped into one section (called the knockout). All lower-rated players were placed into Swiss sections. In the knockout section, the first and all subsequent winners in each round would advance until there was one champion. The losers in each round of each knockout section would be placed into Swiss sections with the other players who were initially placed into the Swiss sections. In case of a draw, a two-game blitz match would have to be played to determine the winner of the match in the knockout section. If the draw persisted after the blitz match, then the person who played with Black in the classical game would advance in the knockout section. After three rounds of lively and wild competition, Joe Bihlmeyer (an expert) and Suhas were tied for first place in the knockout section. It all came down to the blitz playoff. In the end, after intense play, Joe emerged victorious (1.5 out of 2 wins) and became the club's knockout champion of 2024. There were also some exciting games and upsets in the Swiss sections of this summertime tournament. Alexander Alvares-Filshtein, one of the club's rising scholastic chess players, upset FM Richard Bauer in a very nice Fried Liver Attack. The 754-rating point upset was one of the biggest in club history. I am glad that everyone had an enjoyable time with this exciting event. We hope to continue this activity in the club's schedule for many more years to come.

## AUGUST

The NBCC commenced its final month of the summer season with another rated blitz chess tournament, which attracted many new faces, including Alexander Ruth, who we have not seen in a while, and someone from the United Kingdom. For the three weeks after the blitz event, the club organized its annual Summer Show-Up tournament, where players showed up for one, two, or all three weeks for one game per night. The pairings for the rounds were based on each player's closest opposition. It was nice to see the return of a few people who we have not seen in a while - Mike Sheroff and FM Nelson Castaneda. Mike, who also came with his son, Miyim, happened to be in Connecticut on vacation from Florida and wanted to pay the club a visit. For those of you who do not know, Mike was club secretary and a tournament director in the early 1990s. It was also a delight to see Nelson, who recently relocated to Farmington from New Britain and is retiring from teaching mathematics at Central Connecticut State University, where he was the faculty advisor of the CCSU Chess Club. So, folks, you see – you just never know who is going to show up at the club's Summer Show-Up event!

But the main attraction of the month in our club occurred on the last Sunday of the month on August 25 – the 59<sup>th</sup> annual New Britain Summer Open Chess Championship. This heritage tournament, held at the beautiful Wickham Park in Manchester, was organized and promoted by our spiritual leader, USCF NM Suhas Kodali, and drew sixty-three players (the sixth-highest turnout for this event in club history) from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and even way up north in Vermont. It takes a lot of work to make this tournament a success. We were so fortunate to have our usual volunteer support team return this year to ensure the success of another Summer Open. The chief tournament director was Norman Burtness, who did a very professional job in this capacity. He said that this was one of the smoothest tournaments that he has ever directed. Assisting Norman was Bob Cyr, who also helped out Suhas with the promotion of the tournament and with the set-up and clean-up. The food duo of Mario Guevara-Rodriguez (head chef and master of the grill) and Gert Hilhorst executed their duties with sheer perfection. On the huge New England cookout, we had cheeseburgers, veggie burgers, chicken burgers, hot dogs, potato salad, coleslaw, chips, cookies, beverages, and bottled water. For the morning round, we had donut holes and coffee. That perked up everyone's spirit! Serving the food were Estee Axelrad and Natasha Perekopskaya. And finally last, but definitely not least, we thank Roger Bessette and USCF NM David Herscovici for helping clean up after the end of the tournament, helping Suhas put everything away nice and neat. This year, we had a parent, Tig Tillinghast, from Vermont, take many beautiful pictures, many of which are posted on the club website. Overall, Bob's predictions of the weather with mostly sunny skies with temperatures in the 80s held out. There were some rumbles of thunder at the end of round three in the open section, however, that produced some sprinkles, so all games of the final round of the tournament were played under the pavilion. There was a touch of humidity in the air as well, but that is typical of late August in Connecticut. Keeping with the tradition of this event, the open section featured four rounds with a time control of G/45; d/5, and the two lower sections (U1624 and scholastic) featured five rounds with a time control of G/25; d/5. After a long but fun day of spirited competition on the chess board and comradery with friends and family, we had four players tied for first place in the open section – the most ever for a Summer Open. In tie-break order, the winners were USCF NM Derek Meredith (who defended his title from last year), FM Richard Bauer (who surpassed Arkadijs Strazdins' record for the most wins or ties for first place in this event – now at 11 and is also the most senior member (age sixty-eight) to tie for first place in this tournament), Chenxuan Ling (becoming the youngest player to tie for first place in this event at age nine), and Michael Uwakwe (our friend from the Fairfield County Chess Club). Medals were awarded to scholastic players who earned at least 2.5 points.

Overall, this year's Summer Open was one of the greatest in NBCC history. Even though I was hoping for a few more players to attend, especially our NBCC regular members, sometimes people have other commitments. But to draw at least sixty players for this tournament in the last three years shows that we are really doing something right. Everyone raved about the tournament. Few, if any, chess clubs in America hold an outdoor event with a BBQ lunch. That is incredible. So, folks, if you have never had the opportunity to play in this tournament, we look forward to seeing you at the 60<sup>th</sup> annual New Britain Summer Open next year.

## **SEPTEMBER**

The club kicked off its new season with the 2024 NBCC Quick Chess Championship. An eleven-round Swiss over three weeks, this first quick event of the year at the club attracted a record forty-nine chess enthusiasts of all ages and skills, which shattered the prior record of thirty-four. It was nice to see some unfamiliar faces and, of course, the regular ones. There were many intense but spirited games throughout the tournament, but one player who really excelled was scholastic superstar David Mashkov. David is an expert-rated player, but he played like a master in this fun event, giving the top-notch competitors a run for their money, like prior quick chess champions FM Richard Bauer and FM Nelson Castaneda. At the conclusion of this event, David tied for first place with Richard and won on tie-breaks.

In late September, the club hosted another one of its rated blitz chess tournaments. Directed by our newest tournament director, Justin Lalor, this event was a nice break from the serious competition before the Oktoberfest tournament began. Again, David Mashkov dominated the playing field, defeating and drawing prior club blitz champions FM Nelson Castaneda and FM Richard Bauer, respectively. After blazing the competition, David won this event undefeated, becoming one of the few expert players to win a blitz event at the club, with a score 5.5 out of 6.

On the last Saturday of the month, between fifteen to twenty people were invited to a housewarming party at the home of USCF NM Suhas Kodali and his wife, Anitha, in Plainville. The chess crew were treated to a variety of delicious food dishes and drinks, from sandwiches, shrimp, pizza, salad, and mango lassi. Some of the partygoers brought beer and wine. Justin Lalor and USCF NM David Herscovici brought a few board games to play.

Of course, what would be a chess party without chess! Suhas brought USCF NM Derek Meredith's human-size chess set to the party since, unfortunately, he could not attend the festivities. The weather cooperated for the gala, with seasonable temperatures and a light breeze. Suhas and Anitha have a beautiful, big home, and we wish them all the best as they start a new chapter in their life in it.

## **OCTOBER**

The entire month of October at the club was devoted to its annual Oktoberfest Open Chess Championship, the last classical tournament of the year. This festive event, the ideas of which were created during the Joseph Mansigian administration, celebrates the rich German history of our club dating back to some its earliest founders. A club record fifty-six players of all ages and skills from across the state competed in this tournament, which represented nearly ninety percent of our membership. Incredible! There were many interesting games and upsets in this spirited event, and, thus, two studies on lichess.org (one for the open section and one for the U1800 section) had to be created by FM Richard Bauer because of the overflow of game submissions for the 2024 NBCC Best Game contest. After five weeks of play, FM Nelson Castaneda clinched first place in the open section, going a perfect 5-0. He was the only player to win all of his games in either section. And he has also won or tied for first place in the most Oktoberfest Open tournaments. Way to go! In the U1800 section, the lines were drawn in the sand, with four players (a record for a tie in this event!) vying for the top spot. The players in the tie were new members William Adamson, Roberto Urrego, Ben Adelstein, and Nabeel Chasmawala.

Friends, I bring you another NBCC news bulletin! We have a new lecturer at the club. David Mashkov is now our youngest presenter of games in our organization at the age of fifteen. For three weeks in October, before the start of the Oktoberfest tournament, David reviewed some chess theory from famous chess games played in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. After analyzing about three or four games each evening, David went into endgame mode with some puzzles. As most of you know, David is one of the most accomplished scholastic players in the history of our organization. He is a young man who is a scholar and who has a very bright future ahead of him. We wish him all the best of success as he climbs to master level in chess and excels in the academic world. Keep up your amazing talent, David! Your parents and the entire club are proud of you.

## NOVEMBER

After the conclusion of the Oktoberfest tournament, the club held another one of its rated blitz chess events. Even though it was Election Day, we had an impressive thirty-three players in attendance for this fun activity. None of the club officers or tournament directors had planned to be there that night, so there was doubt whether or not this tournament would even be held, let alone be rated. But Bob Cyr, who supervised one of our future (and maybe youngest!) tournament directors, David Mashkov, was there to help David run the tournament and make sure that it was rated. David handled the registrations and made the pairings with ease, using Caissa. As always, these blitz chess tournaments are exciting and entertaining. In the end, David tied for first place in the event with Joseph Bihlmeyer (our esteemed kids coach) and Jack Qian (another rising scholastic star like David). It should be pointed out for the history books that rarely does a player win or tie in back-to-back blitz chess tournaments in our club. Outstanding play once again, David!

In keeping with tradition with the Oktoberfest tournament, the club hosted its annual dinner party, treating volunteers and their extended family to a lovely meal on Saturday, November 9, at the Wood 'N Tap, a beautiful restaurant overlooking the Farmington River. Almost a record eighteen people showed up for this social gathering. Everyone had an enjoyable time. USCF NM Suhas Kodali, our spiritual and devoted leader, thanked everyone for coming. He also extended appreciation to all of the volunteers there, especially three people who have done amazing work behind the scenes in the last year for the club – Justin Lalor (for his work on the club articles of incorporation and tax filings); FM Richard Bauer (for hosting the Saturday evening chess sessions and for analyzing the hundreds of games for the best game of the year contest); Roger Bessette (for his contributions as our newest tournament director and for closing the club nearly every week). In turn, everyone raised a glass for Suhas and thanked him for his steadfast support and continued service to the club. Bob Cyr, who has attended all nineteen club Oktoberfest dinner parties, also made some toasts. The first toast was to the late Joe Mansigian, who created the ideas for the club's first Oktoberfest dinner party, and the second toast was to the NBCC, one of the greatest chess clubs in America. Cheers to the NBCC!

The club officers brought back the class championships this year by popular demand. This event strives to place players into sections based on rating classes. This two-week event was a nice break from the serious competition at the club. This tournament was quick rated. With the exception of Joseph Bihlmeyer, the other quad winners were relatively new members. Without further ado, here were the winners of the 2024 NBCC Class Championships:

- Quad 1: Joseph Bihlmeyer
- Quad 2: Luca Festa
- Quad 3: Ian Wohlhieter
- Quad 4: Alexander Alvares-Filshtein
- Quad 5: Jithya Sajeevan
- Quad 6: Ben Adelstein

The final highlight at the club in November was a memorial event held for USCF NM Christopher “Chris” Dearing. Chris was a member during the 1980s and was a stalwart for Connecticut chess. The club found out about his passing a few years ago from his sister, Danielle, who lives in California. Chris was a beloved member of our organization and had a passion for the game. He relished playing chess at the club with his longtime friends, USCF NM Eric Godin, USCF NM Ted McHugh, and USCF SM Mike Casella. He was loved by many. One of Chris’ favorite chess openings was the Bronstein-Larsen Variation of the Caro-Kann Defense, which he played exclusively with the black pieces. It is now all the rage amongst all levels of chess players. On the night of Chris’ memorial, there was a lecture given by FM Richard Bauer about this popular opening. Afterwards, there were stories shared about Chris by USCF NM Derek Meredith and his high school friend, Stephen Dalfino. In Chris’ honor, the club held an unrated thematic tournament, with all players having to play the Bronstein-Larsen Variation of the Caro-Kann Defense. Chris loved to play bullet and no-increment chess, so the tournament was a G/3; d0 in his remembrance. The winner of the event was Alexander Ruth. It should be noted that Danielle and her family made a generous contribution to the club in Chris’ memory. Since Danielle could not be at the club to personally thank everyone for hosting this event, she had two of her best friends in the area come to the club to do a virtual live-stream video to capture the event. In addition, the Dearing family sent the club a lovely thank-you letter, which is published later in this newsletter and which Bob Cyr read that night. Overall, it was a lovely evening.

## DECEMBER

The NBCC kicked off one of its most packed December's in history with another thematic event, a memorial for Joe Hricko. Known fondly as "HR," Joe was one of our veteran members who passed away last year. The club found out about Joe's passing from his son, Jason Duarte. Even though the club already held a memorial for his father last year, Jason wanted to keep the memory of his father alive with an annual tributary tournament. With the kindness of his heart, Jason made a generous donation to the club in memory of his dad. Prior to the tournament, USCF NM Derek Meredith gave a touching tribute to "HR," who described "HR's" energetic playing style and opening repertoire on the chess board by analyzing two of Joe's favorite defenses as Black – the Dutch and the Sicilian Dragon. Since Jason could not be at the club on December 3 to view the lecture, USCF NM Suhas Kodali arranged a virtual live-stream of it. Many players of all skills attended the thematic event. The participants in the six-round tournament had to play the Sicilian Dragon Defense if White played e4, and the participants had to play the Dutch Defense if White played d4. In essence, it was a dual-thematic event – a first in club history! Incredible! Some players did, however, struggle with these fancy and unique openings, but in the end, FM Nelson Castaneda, who took a half-point bye in the first round, went undefeated with a score of 5.5-.5 and claimed first place. Lastly, it should be noted that Ben Adelstein and Alexander Alvarez-Filshtein ("AJ") took command at the TD station, registering players and making the pairings. Roger Bessette trained them.

On Saturday, December 7, the officers hosted the NBCC's first-ever game night at the club. Eighteen players from the community participated in various games throughout the evening. Besides chess, players competed in board games like Blood on the Clocktower, Concordia, Power Grid, backgammon, Chinese chess, and Sequence. FM Richard Bauer also held the Saturday study group live at the club. Virtual participants could also join the session. The group reviewed some games from the 2024 World Chess Championship match between Ding Liren and the challenger Gukesh Dommaraju. In all, it was an enjoyable evening at the club.

It is always beneficial when chess organizations in Connecticut come together for a great cause. In early December, the DIG organization, which has done a tremendous amount of work with chess in the schools, reached out to the chess community about having local institutions donate chess sets to St. Ann's School in Bridgeport. The NBCC, which is another incredible chess organization, graciously donated twenty chess sets to this wonderful cause.

The club continued its busy month of December with another memorial tournament for Joe Mansigian, one of our former club presidents. Prior to the start of the blitz chess tournament on December 10, FM Richard Bauer reviewed some of Joe's games that he played later in his life. Even though Joe was a computer programmer by trade, he never really devoted the time to studying chess, ironically. As Rick noted, Joe was a very bright, personable, and creative person. Unlike our last two honorees (Chris Dearing and Joe Hricko), Joe did not remain faithful to any chess opening defenses against the black pieces, but he always played e4 and was willing to sacrifice a pawn for the attack. One of Joe's favorite openings was the Milner Barry Attack vs. the French Defense, which he alternated with the Sicilian Defense for Black. After Rick's touching tribute of and testimonial about Joe, a few members (Bob Cyr and Joseph Bihlmeyer) spoke about their fond memories of Joe. Afterwards, USCF NM Suhas Kodali concluded by saying that contributors to the club like Joe were very inspirational to him, and it was people like Joe who paved the way for the future generations of the club. In the spirit of the evening, there were many fun games. In the end, one of our club's masters, USCF NM David Herscovici, won the tournament. Before we move on with the next highlight, I am delighted to mention that Ian Wohlhieter was the chief tournament director of this tournament, his first time in this capacity. Our seasoned TD, Roger Bessette, supervised Ian.

On the third Tuesday of the month, the club held its biggest social gala of the year, the 19<sup>th</sup> annual Christmas party. This event has historically attracted tens of members and their families in the chess community. In the spirit of the season, this is definitely one of my most favorite times of the year at the club, where people come together and socialize and reminisce about the year's past. There were many people who we owe a debt a gratitude to making this party a success: USCF NM Suhas Kodali for planning and promoting the celebration; Estee Axelrad for the decorations and the setup; Lisa Smith for ordering the food from Fitzgerald's Foods in Simsbury; Gert Hilhorst for the cleanup; and Bob Cyr for his year-end commentary, annual newsletter, but, most importantly, with his entertaining of traditional Christmas carols on his keyboard throughout the evening, which everyone enjoyed. He also brought in Christmas music from his legendary Neil Diamond and Kenny Rogers collection to play on his CD player during times of intermission. The party began at 6:30 p.m. with the food. On the bountiful menu, we had chicken piccata, cheese lasagna, meat lasagna, macaroni and cheese, garden salad, dinner rolls, roasted red bliss potatoes, carrot cake, and beverages. Also bringing food were John Nitz, Sean Bianchi, Luca Fiesta, Praharsh Varada, Suhas, and Bob.

At 7:30 p.m., our club's annual bullet chess championship was held. The action on the chess boards was fast and furious! Unfortunately, our fastest chess players, with the exception of FM Richard Bauer, did not show up, which paved the way for others to win the title of NBCC Bullet Chess Champion. After close to two hours, Joseph Bihlmeyer, our experienced expert chess player, won the event, only losing one game. Overall, the spectacular evening was filled with delicious food, awesome entertainment, socialization, and, of course, chess. The NBCC surely knows how to party! The night was a total success!

Normally, the NBCC Christmas party signals the end of the highlights of the year. But wait! There was one more major activity that occurred at the church on Friday evening, December 20, and Saturday morning, December 21. On Friday evening, the WGM gave a master class training session, starting with puzzles and then analyzing two of her favorite games and victories, one of which qualified her for the 2023 World Cup Chess Championship. On Saturday morning, the WGM gave a one-hour lecture followed by simultaneous chess exhibition. Eleven players showed up for the simul, and the only person to draw the WGM was FM Richard Bauer. As some of you might recall, the WGM came to the club in 2016 when she was fourteen years old to wipe the floor during the club's annual meeting bullet chess tournament. As of this writing, she is going to participate in the Women's World Rapid & Blitz Chess Championships in NYC, and she decided to stop by the club to share some of her lessons on her way to being a top women's player. She also recently participated in GM Judith Polgar's Training Camp and had lots of insights to share for our more advanced players. We thank the WGM for coming to the club on such short notice and appreciate the time that she devoted to engaging our members in this incredible weekend chess retreat, capping an incredible year for the club.

## **NBCC MEMBERS' MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS**

The following major achievements were earned by our members at non-club tournaments and in the USCF in 2024.

Please note that only ratings of USCF members who have been active within the last year were used in compiling the Top 100 listings.

| NBCC MEMBER         | USCF<br>TOP PLAYER LIST        | USCF<br>RATING | USCF<br>RANKING       |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| FM Nelson Castaneda | Age 65 or Older                | 2343           | 21 <sup>st</sup>      |
|                     | Quick Age 65 or Older          | 2204           | 22 <sup>nd</sup>      |
|                     | Blitz Age 65 or Older          | 2184           | 17 <sup>th</sup>      |
|                     | Age 50 or Older                | 2343           | 50 <sup>th</sup>      |
|                     | Quick Age 50 or Older          | 2204           | 56 <sup>th</sup>      |
|                     | Blitz Age 50 or Older          | 2184           | 41 <sup>st</sup>      |
| FM Richard Bauer    | Age 65 or Older                | 2200           | 69 <sup>th</sup> tied |
|                     | Blitz Age 65 or Older          | 2078           | 33 <sup>rd</sup>      |
|                     | Blitz Age 50 or Older          | 2078           | 77 <sup>th</sup>      |
| Elizabeth Smith     | Women<br>Age 65 or Older       | 1439           | 19 <sup>th</sup>      |
|                     | Quick Women<br>Age 65 or Older | 1321           | 17 <sup>th</sup>      |
|                     | Blitz Women<br>Age 65 or Older | 1348           | 6 <sup>th</sup>       |
|                     | Women<br>Age 50 or Older       | 1439           | 38 <sup>th</sup> tied |
|                     | Quick Women<br>Age 50 or Older | 1321           | 32 <sup>nd</sup>      |
|                     | Blitz Women<br>Age 50 or Older | 1348           | 15 <sup>th</sup>      |
| Jithya Sajeevan     | Girls Age 16                   | 1532           | 49 <sup>th</sup>      |
| Jack Qian           | Blitz Under Age 13             | 1719           | 83 <sup>rd</sup>      |
| Brian Dai           | Age 7 or Under                 | 1317           | 18 <sup>th</sup>      |

It should be noted that Praharsh Varada (age 12 as of 12/1/2024) should have made the Top 100 list for his age, but unfortunately, the USCF did not have any record of his birthdate.

## **NBCC MEMBER ATTAINING THE LEVEL OF USCF EXPERT**

David Mashkov attained the level of USCF expert at the age of fifteen, the second youngest member to accomplish this incredible feat.

## **OTHER SIGNIFICANT NBCC MEMBER ACHIEVEMENTS**

Lacey Wang became the 2024 Connecticut state elementary chess champion on January 8.

Lisa Smith took home the title of Top Senior Aged 65 or Older in the 2024 Connecticut State Senior Open Chess Championship held in Middletown on February 24.

USCF NM Derek Meredith drew GM Sergey Kudrin in the 2024 Connecticut State Senior Open Chess Championship held in Middletown on February 24.

Joseph Bihlmeyer also drew GM Sergey Kudrin in the 2024 Connecticut State Senior Open Chess Championship held in Middletown on February 24.

USCF NM Jordan Groff drew GM Tal Baron in the 2024 Maryland Open Chess Championship held in Rockville from April 19 to 21.

USCF NM Derek Meredith tied for first place in the 2024 World Open Senior Amateur Chess Championship held in Philadelphia, PA, over Independence Day weekend.

USCF NM Jordan Groff won the Top U2300 prize (and a cool \$1,000) in the 2024 Continental Open Chess Championship held in Marlborough, MA, from August 15 to 18.

Joseph Bihlmeyer drew GM Sergey Kudrin in the 2024 Hartford County and City Chess Championship held in East Hartford on September 7.

USCF NM Jordan Groff drew GM Alexander Ivanov in the 2024 Connecticut State Open Chess Championship held in Hartford on September 21.

USCF NM James Nitz tied for first place in the 2024 North Carolina State Chess Championship held in Burlington from October 11 to 13.

USCF NM Jordan Groff won the 2024 Fairfield County and Norwalk City Chess Championship held in Norwalk on December 7. He also drew GM Sergey Kudrin in the tournament.

## CHess TRIVIA

With the U.S. presidential election making the daily news this year, I decided to create questions for the chess trivia section of the 2024 club newsletter about U.S. presidents and chess.

These questions are a little harder than the ones that I drafted in the 2020 NBCC newsletter, when we had the last U.S. presidential election. So, I dare you to take this challenge! Good luck! The answers are on page 50.

1. What U.S. president invited the foreign masters who played in the Cambridge chess tournament to the White House?
  - a. William McKinley
  - b. William Howard Taft
  - c. Woodrow Wilson
  - d. Theodore Roosevelt
  
2. The quote, “International relations have traditionally been compared to a chess game in which each nation tries to outwit and checkmate the other,” was said by what U.S. president?
  - a. Harry S. Truman
  - b. Franklin Delano Roosevelt
  - c. Dwight D. Eisenhower
  - d. John F. Kennedy
  
3. Dr. William Small, a professor of mathematics at the College of William and Mary, probably taught chess to what U.S. president?
  - a. John Adams
  - b. George Washington
  - c. Thomas Jefferson
  - d. James Madison
  
4. The secretary of state under what U.S. president called Bobby Fischer to encourage him to play against World Chess Champion Boris Spassky?
  - a. Ronald Reagan
  - b. Jimmy Carter
  - c. Gerald Ford
  - d. Richard Nixon

## NBCC PICTURE GALLERY

The following photos were taken by David Fusco, Estee Axelrad, Suhas Kodali,  
Richard Bauer, Tig Tillinghast, and Bob Cyr.

### WORLD AMATEUR TEAM CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP 2024



#### BACK ROW

Bob Cyr, Richard Bauer, Joseph Bihlmeyer, Doug Fiske, Mike Pascetta,  
John Nitz, Norman Burtness, and James Nitz

#### CENTER

Krystian Tkaczewski, Jr.

Missing from this picture were Derek Meredith, David Fusco, and Kashvi Madhwani

**NBCC CHAMPIONS OF 2024 (WITH TD SUHAS KODALI)**



**BACK ROW**

Daniel Knowles, Alexander Alvarez-Filshtein, Jordan Groff, Joe Bihlmeyer, Derek Meredith, John Pasco, David Mashkov, Doug Fiske, and Suhas Kodali

**FRONT ROW**

Yonatan Axelrad, Aryan Jangle, Luca Festa, and Sean Bianchi

**JOINT SIMULTANEOUS CHESS EXHIBITION OF 2024**  
**BY DEREK MEREDITH AND JORDAN GROFF**



Derek (standing up - left) ponders his move against John Pasco while Jordan (standing up - right) makes his move against David Fusco

**STRAZDINS CUP – STEIN CHAMPIONS OF 2024**



**BACK ROW**

Bob Cyr, Alexander Alvarez-Filshtein, Benjamin Fields, Ian Wohlhieter, David Fusco, Joe Bihlmeyer, David Herscovici, Roger Bessette, Jordan Groff, Dennis Himes, Darshan Dharanimala, and Praharsh Varada

**FRONT ROW**

Pragyan Pandey, Luca Festa, and David Mashkov

**NBCC KNOCKOUT AND SWISS CHAMPIONS OF 2024**



Benjamin Fields, Suhas Kodali, Alexander Alvarez-Filshtein,  
Joe Bihlmeyer, Praharsh Varda, and Eric Ren

**NBCC GENERATIONS CHAMPIONS OF 2024**



Suhas Kodali, Yonatan Axelrad, Ian Wohlhieter, Richard Bauer, Max Mashkov, Jonathan Fisch,  
Doug Fiske, Sean Bianchi, Praharsh Varda, Daniel Knowles, Joe Miglizzi, and Daniel Chou

**NEW BRITAIN SUMMER OPEN CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP OF 2024**



Max Mashkov awaits his opponents move



Peter Kingsley faces off against Daniel Knowles



David Mashkov in deep battle with Arush Ghosh

## **NBCC QUICK CHAMPIONS OF 2024 (WITH TD JUSTIN LALOR)**



Ben Adelstein, David and Max Mashkov (back and front), Jack Qian, Sean Bianchi, Prahars Varada, Richard Bauer, and Justin Lalor

## **OKTOBERFEST OPEN CHESS CHAMPIONS OF 2024**



Ben Adelstein, Alexander Alvarez-Filschtein, Nabeel Chasmawala, Roberto Urrego, David Herscovici, Ian Wohlhieter, Roger Bessette, Nelson Castaneda, David Mashkov, Sean Bianchi, Prahars Varada, and Suhas Kodali

**2024 NEW BRITAIN CHESS CLUB OKTOBERFEST DINNER PARTY**



The NBCC officers and their spouses



The NBCC volunteers and their family

WOMENS GRANDMASTER PRIYANKA NUTAKKI'S VISIT TO THE NBCC  
MASTER CLASS TRAINING, LECTURE, AND SIMULTANEOUS CHESS EXHIBITION



BACK ROW

Akshayahari, Patrick, Praharsh, Rick, Joe, Roger, Ian, Gert, John, Bob, and Suhas

FRONT ROW

WGM Priyanka Nutakki, Brian, Krystian, Luca, Sumannyu, and Jack



Priyanka Nutakki teaching the class



Players participate in the simul

## NBCC GRAND PRIX WINNER OF 2024

In 2022, FM Richard Bauer and Bob Cyr came up with the ideas for the first NBCC Grand Prix contest. The process and conditions to determine a winner are quite simple. Throughout the year, points earned by the top two scorers in each of the club's major tournaments (New Britain Chess Club Championship, Planet Earth Chess Championship, Winner's Keepers Chess Tournament, Strazdins Cup / Stein, New Britain Chess Club Generations Championship, New Britain Knockout and Swiss Chess Tournament, New Britain Summer Open Chess Championship, New Britain Summer Show-Up Chess Tournament, Oktoberfest Open Chess Championship) were tabulated. In the end, USCF NM Jordan Groff earned 13.5 GP points. Excellent job, Jordan! Jordan was presented with a plaque for his fine accomplishment. Jordan is one of our top ranked chess players. He is also a chess coach and lecturer at the club and at the Hamden Chess Club. His picture is below.



## THE GREATEST HIGHLIGHT OF EACH MONTH IN THE LAST TWENTY YEARS

A myriad of highlights has been written and preserved about the club in the last twenty years, many of them having an indelible impact on the history of our organization. Listed below are the most significant highlights of each month since 2005 that I have chosen to publish. I hope you will agree that these were our biggest hits!

**JANUARY 2007:** The club directed its first tournament (a quick event) using SwissSys, a computerized pairing software.

**FEBRUARY 2010:** The club fielded the most teams ever (six) at the World Amateur Team Chess Championship.

**MARCH 2011:** The club held its first Planet Earth Chess Championship. It was held at the Hawk's Landing Country Club. A buffet style lunch was served.

**APRIL 2023:** The club hosted its first Winner's Keepers Chess Tournament, where the section winners got their names immortalized for next year's event.

**MAY 2007:** The club organized the first Arkadijs Strazdins Cup in honor of the club's greatest contributor and advocate.

**JUNE 2023:** At the club's annual meeting, our vice president presented his ideas, along with the new club bylaws, for our club to become incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-for-profit organization.

**JULY 2009:** A record seventy-eight players attended the New Britain Summer Open Chess Championship, the greatest turnout for any event in club history.

**AUGUST 2005:** The first quick and sectional event in club history was held.

**SEPTEMBER 2005:** Derek Meredith organized a chess function at his house, which began the hugest social network expansion in our club for many years to come.

**OCTOBER 2006:** The first Oktoberfest Open Chess Championship took place, and, at the conclusion of the event, a dinner party was held at the East Side Restaurant.

**NOVEMBER 2017:** The club hosted its first movie night, with the featured film "Queen of Katwe." Food and refreshments were served before the movie.

**DECEMBER 2005:** Members and friends attended the club's first Christmas party and raffle.

# NBCC PICTURE GALLERY: THROUGH THE YEARS



Yogesh Raghunathan, Brian Kosnoff, Doug Fiske, Gert Hilhorst  
2007 NBCC Oktoberfest Dinner Party



USCF NM Ted McHugh  
2008 Arkadijs Strazdins Cup Winner



Sofia Leja, Andres Castaneda, and Mark Leja  
2009 Zimmerman Games Day



Tom Hartmayer, Andris Strazdins, and Rob Roy  
2010 New Britain Summer Open



Christopher Lomeli vs. John Nitz

2011 NBCC – UConn Chess Match



George "Good Knight" Himes takes on his dad, Dennis "Bad Bishop" Himes  
**2012 NBCC CHRISTMAS PARTY**



JOE HRICKO AND MARCUS KOMONS

2013 New Britain Summer Open



NBCC Chef Crew  
Mitch Daniels, Marie Juergens, and Kevin Zimmerman

2014 New Britain Summer Open



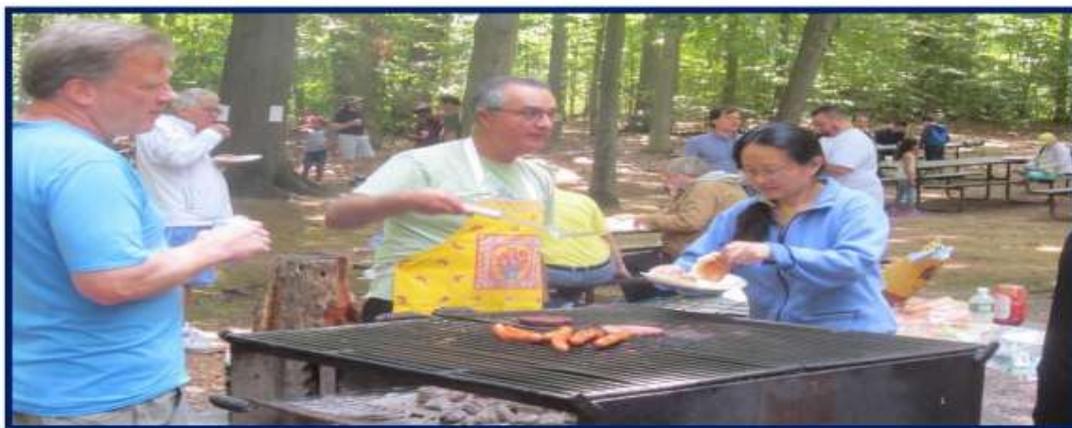
Bob McDaniel and Jimi Wilkin

Nick Stevens Memorial – 2015



Norman Burtness and Richard Bauer

2016 CT State Closed Chess Championship



Master Chef Mario Guevara-Rodriguez

with Derek Meredith (left) and Joy (right)  
2017 New Britain Summer Open



**BITCOIN PONZIANI SCHEME**

Suhas Kodali, Bob Cyr, Bill Montross, and Mike Pascetta

2018 USATE

**2019 CT STATE CHAMPIONSHIP**



Yoon-Young Kim vs. Nelson Castaneda

**CONNECTICUT STATE OPEN 2020 WOMEN'S CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP**



BACK TO FRONT, LEFT TO RIGHT

THEJA SURESHNAGAN VS. ELIZABETH SMITH, JASMINE SU VS. MACKENZIE FURMAN



Bob Wooster vs. Eric Hilhorst

**JUSTIN LALOR SIMULTANEOUS CHESS EXHIBITION OF 2022**



Justin Lalor makes his move against Jozef Madej

2021 NBCC Championship

**WINNER'S KEEPERS CHESS WINNERS OF 2023**



Mark Bourque, David Mashkov, and Krystian Tkaczewski Jr.

## THE PASSING OF JOSEPH “JOE” MANSIGIAN

I am the bearer of very sad and tragic news for the NBCC community. I found out through Kevin Zimmerman, who is friends with Preston (who shared a home with Joseph Mansigian), that veteran member, former club president, and our beloved friend, Joseph “Joe” Mansigian, suddenly passed away on April 12. Joe just turned seventy-seven on March 30.



Joe joined our family in 1970 and had a membership with our organization that spanned over five decades, one of the longest of any person in NBCC history. Joe recounted to me about his earliest experiences with the club, especially being warmly welcomed and greeted each and every week by its new president at the time, Arkadijs Strazdins. Joe said that his passion for the club was instilled by Mr. Strazdins. Joe enjoyed competing in all of the club’s activities, but he relished the blitz tournaments the most. During his peak, Joe attained a very high-class A rating, coming ever so close to expert level. In 1976, he won the New Britain City Chess Championship Reserve Tournament, which was his first major event victory in the club. In the club’s archives, as of April 2024, Joe ranked in the top 20 for earning the most wins or ties for first place in classical tournaments.

Beyond the chess board, Joe served the club very dutifully. From 1997 to 1998 and from 1999 to 2001, he served as club secretary. In 2001, he was elected to serve as club vice president with then president-elect John Pasco, who recounted to me about his fond memories of Joe. In 2003, when John unfortunately left the club presidency, Joe stepped up to the mantle and became our newest spiritual leader. For the next seven years, I had the utmost pleasure of serving as his vice president, working on projects for the betterment of the club and for the welfare of its members. Joe carried on the many traditions that both Mr. Strazdins and John did for the club, but Joe incorporated some new and very interesting tournaments during his administration. In particular, he organized the first Arkadijs Strazdins Cup to honor and pay tribute to Mr. Strazdins for his fifty-plus years of service to our organization, and he created the beautiful ideas for the first Oktoberfest Open Chess Championship, an event to celebrate the German heritage of our long-established organization. In 2005, Joe organized the club’s first Christmas party. All of these activities still exist today because of Joe. In 2010, Joe stepped down from the NBCC presidency, but he remained a strong advocate and ambassador for our tight-knit community.

In his post-presidency years, you could find Joe playing chess at Borders and then Barnes & Noble on the weekends and at his chess friends’ homes. I organized a surprise party for Joe’s seventieth birthday at a local restaurant, inviting many of his longtime friends. He was so thrilled! In 2019, under the Norman Burtness administration, Joe was honored with a lifetime membership for his many years of steadfast service to the club.

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic hit Joe very hard, forcing him to take many precautions because of his pre-existing medical conditions. He, therefore, decided that it was best to remain at home as much as possible, which meant taking a hiatus from the club. He returned to the club in 2023, playing in the Arkadijs Strazdins Cup and the New Britain Summer Open Chess Championship, which he recently told me that he was eagerly looking forward to playing in this event later this year. In late 2023, Joe’s health took a turn for the worse again, and he was forced to reside in a rehabilitation center to undergo treatment for spinal stenosis and kidney failure. A few months ago, FM Richard Bauer, Paul Gobell, and I paid Joe a visit at Apple Valley in Plainville. Joe was a such a gracious host by treating us to a pizza lunch. He really enjoyed the time that we spent with him. I had a chance to play a couple of games of chess with Joe. Both of these games were analyzed and posted on lichess.org by Rick.

If you never knew Joe, he was one of the most altruistic persons in our family. Like Mr. Strazdins, he treated everyone with dignity and respect regardless of who you were. His loss is a deep and sorrowful one for all of us in the NBCC. The last time I spoke with Joe, he said that he wanted to treat me to dinner or cook for me at his home, which he hoped to return to very soon. I, like many others, loved and admired Joe. May Joe be remembered as one of all-time greats in NBCC history, and may he rest in peace in heaven for all eternity.

The photo of Joe above was taken at the 2009 Zimmerman Games Day. He indeed loved the club’s social gatherings.

**A THANK-YOU LETTER FROM THE  
CHRISTOPHER "CHRIS" DEARING FAMILY  
ABOUT THE HOLDING OF HIS MEMORIAL EVENT**



Thanks from Danielle Dearing (in picture above), Denise Dearing, Trisha Dearing, and Adriana Byron

## **NBCC BEST GAME OF 2024**

From FM Richard Bauer:

“Last year, I selected a very accurate game, but it lacked the flash and counterplay of past years. This year, I am going a totally different way. This game appealed to me because of the dramatic swings of fortune and remarkable tactical elements. Countless pins and skewers culminate in a ‘forever pin’ that still does not decide the game. I was able to view it in person, without the aid of a computer, so I had a sense of how hard the tactics were to figure out. It is a ‘club game’ extraordinaire!

I will admit to being influenced by the fact that the winner of this game has done so much for the club and to keep this competition going into its second decade.

There were two other games that need mentioning: the opening crush of the year, Lacombe-Fusco from the Black side of a Caro; and the upset of the year, ‘AJ’ vs. Rick Bauer in the Fried Liver Attack. While both reflected great opening preparation, the attacks needed to be capably finished off, as chess never ‘plays itself.’

I have moved these three games to the top of the study. The order of the remaining games does not matter, but they are all worth looking at.”

**A “PIN-FUL” GAME**  
**New Britain Summer Show-up Chess Tournament R1 S1**  
**Bob Cyr - Mack Elder**  
**Philador Defense**  
**<https://lichess.org/study/xMr3YJPh/5dZfLnre>**  
**Annotated by FM Rick Bauer**

**1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 c6**

3... g6 would lead to the Pirc, but Black is planning a transposition to the Philador's, which has a rich history in the club. His idea is to get out of the opening with a solid position and defer complications until later.

**4. Bg5?!**

This bishop will be the source of counterplay going forward. Nf3 and f4 are the main moves here.

**4... Nbd7 5. Nf3 e5**

Black does VERY well from this position in the Master database!

**6. dxe5?! dxe5** liberating the Bf8!

6. a4!? Be7 7. Bc4 would be better.

**7. Bc4**

The strongest square for the Bishop but also the weakest! It is subject to attack with ...b5 or ...Nb6.

**7... Qe7?! +=** blocking the newly liberated Bf8 can't be good.

7... Bb4!?

**8. O-O**

8. a4

**8... b5(!) 9. Bd3(!)**

9. Bb3 h6

**9... Nc5 10. Bxf6?**

White must part with one of his bishops, but not this one! Also releasing a pin without being "asked" is almost always wrong. 10. b4! Nxd3 11. Qxd3 Qxb4 12. a4! bxa4 13. Rfd1 Be7 14. Nxe5

**10... Qxf6 {BNxBB} 11. Be2**

11. b4! Nxd3 12. Qxd3

**11... b4**

11... Be7!? {shows the threat to be better than the execution since the Nc5 may be better going to d4 or f4.}

**12. Nb1**



Early Fireworks: Should Black take the e4 pawn?

**12... Nxe4**

The extra pawn will be hard to hold. 12... Ne6!? 13. Nbd2 Nf4 =+ {looks better.}

**13. Qe1?! =+**

13. a3! opens more lines before trying to win back the pawn; 13... a5 (13... bxa3 14. Nxa3)

**13... Bd6 14. Bd3 Ng5?!**

14... Nc5! Gives Black a real edge.

**15. Nxc5 Qxc5 16. f4**

This looks good, but Black can maintain a piece on e5. Better is 16. Nd2 O-O 17. Ne4! =

**16... Qe7 17. Qe4?! x c6, h7 17... Bb7?!**

White was hoping for 17... O-O?? 18. Qxh7# but 17... Bd7! xf5 18. f5 (18. Nd2 f5 and e4) 18... Qg5 =+ is better.

**18. fxe5**

18. Nd2!

**18... Bc5+?**

18... Qxe5! 19. Qxe5+ Bxe5. White can pin the bishop, but he can't win it! 20. Re1 f6 =+

**19. Kh1 Bb6 20. Qf4?! +=**

A "hiccup" in White's development allows the black king to get out of the center. 20. Nd2 c5 21. Bb5+ +/-

**20... O-O 21. Nd2 Bc7 22. Nf3 f6? +/-**

22... h6 23. Qe4 g6 24. Rae1 +=



How should White attack?

**23. Qc4+**

23. Qh4! Takes immediate advantage of the weakened king 23... g6 (23... h6 24. Rae1) 24. exf6 Qxf6 (24... Rxf6 25. Rae1) 25. Ng5, when Black's two bishops, aggressively aimed at the White king, can do nothing for their own monarch.

**23... Kh8 24. exf6**

24. Qh4! g5 25. exf6! gxh4 26. fxe7 +/-

**24... Rxf6 25. Rae1**

25. Qh4 h6 26. Rae1 Qd6 27. Ne5 Rxf1+ 28. Bxf1 Rf8 29. Bd3 +/-

**25... Qd6** Only move **26. g3?** -/+

White has enjoyed the initiative since the temporary sacrifice of his e-pawn, keeping the two bishops at bay. He figures that placing the kingside pawns on dark squares will blunt the Bc7 and 27. Be4 will counter the Bb7. But there is another diagonal at play here. Best is 26. Qe4! Rh6 27. Qe8+ Qf8 28. Qxf8+ Rxf8 29. Re7 x c7, b7

**26...c5!** -/+ **27. Be4 Ba6! x c4,f1 28. Qd5**

28. Qxa6!? Qxa6 29. Bxa8 +/-

**28... Qxd5 29. Bxd5 Rd8** -/+

Black is not winning on the spot due to his soft back rank, but the bishops are starting to come alive.

**30. Rf2 h6**

30... g5!? is more dual purpose: 31. Rd2 (31. Nxc5 Rxf2) (31. Re6! Rxe6 32. Bxe6 Bb7 33. Kg2)

**31. Be4 Re8?**

31... Bb6! -+ 32. c3 (32. Rd2 Re8 33. Kg2 Rfe6 34. Bf5 Rxe1) 32... g5 33. Kg2 g4 34. Ne5 Rxf2+ 35. Kxf2 Rd2+)

**32. Kg2 Rfe6?**

This pin doesn't work. 32... c4!? 33. Nd4! Rxf2+ 34. Kxf2 Ba5 +/-

**33. Nd2?**

Too passive. 33. Bg6!! = since Rxe1 34. Nxe1 uncovers the Rf2 to attack the back rank.

**33... c4! 34. c3 bxc3 35. bxc3 Ba5!** xc3, d2, e1. Another weak diagonal!

**36. Rf3 Rxe4?**

36... Bb6!, and White is close to zugzwang! 37. Rf4 (37. Kf1 Bb7) (37. Rf7 Kg8 38. Rd7 (38. Rf4 g5 39. Bd5 (39. Rf5 Bb7) 39... Bb7) 38... Bb5 (38... Bc8 39. Rd5 Bb7)) 37... Bb7 38. h4 Ba5 -+

**37. Rxe4**

37. Nxe4 Bb7 38. Rfe3, and Black cannot add to the pressure on e4.

**37... Rd8! 38. Re2**

38. Nxc4!? = Bb7 39. Ree3. White now has the exchange for the two bishops. It is hard to say who is better.

**38... Bb7 39. Ne4?!**

Trying to hold on to the exchange, but the bishops are too powerful 39. Nxc4 Bxc3 =

**39... Re8 40. Rfe3?**

40. Rf4! just barely holds. 40... g5 41. Rg4 h5 42. Rxg5 Rxe4 43. Rxh5+ Kg7 =+

**40... Bb6! -+ 41. Kf3**

41. Kf1!? Bc6! -+ (41... Bxe3? 42. Nd6)

**41... Rf8+ 42. Kg4 Bxe3 43. Rxe3 Re8 44. Kf5 Bc8+ 45. Kf4 g5+ 46. Kf3 Bb7!**



The Forever Pin Should Win!

The Forever Pin! Joe B. had just lectured on the power of this. All of White's pieces are frozen while Black's have complete mobility.

**47. g4 Kg7 48. h3 Kg6**

48... Re5. Given unlimited time, I would use it to move the king over to the queenside and gather up those two pawns: 49. Re2 Kf8 50. Re3 Ke7 51. Re2 Kd8 52. Re3 Kc7 53. Re2 Kb6 54. h4 Ka5 55. hxg5 hxg5 56. Re3 Ka4 57. Re2 Ka3 58. Re3 Kxa2 59. Re2+ Kb3 60. Re3 Rxe4 61. Rxe4 Kxc3 62. Ke3 Bxe4 63. Kxe4 Kd2

**49. Re2 h5 50. gxh5+?!**

Setting up a super fork on f6 that cannot be played!

**50... Kxh5 51. Re3 Kh4 52. a3 Kxh3??**

Having walked through apparent super forks, Black must have felt invulnerable, but now he "discovers" the only kryptonite in the position, a discovered check with White's king, escaping the Forever Pin 52... Rxe4 53. Rxe4+ Kxh3 54. Ke3 Bxe4 55. Kxe4 g4 0-1

**53. Kf2+! Kh4 54. Nd6**

Black needs to regroup after the shock of losing the Forever Pin. He still has an extra pawn and a bishop for a knight. Trading rooks would seem to be the best chance to capitalize.

**54... Rf8+?**

Keeping rooks on the board makes the game harder for Black to win. 54... Rxe3! 55. Kxe3 Bd5 56. Kd4 (56. Kf2 Kg4 57. Nb5 a5 58. Nc7 Bf7 59. Nb5 Kf4) 56... Be6 57. Ke5 Bg8 -, and White cannot get the c-pawn off the board before he has to sacrifice the knight for the g-pawn.

**55. Kg1 Bd5 -/+ 56. Re7 56. Re5! 56... Rf3 57. Rxa7?**

57. Re5!

**57... Rxc3**

Now, Black has two strong passed pawns to White's one, which trails them both.

**58. Nf5+ Kg4 59. Nh6+ Kh5**

59... Kg3 60. Nf5+ Kf4 looks stronger

**60. Nf5 Rc1+? -/+ Forcing the king forward 61. Kf2 Be4?? =**

61... Rc2+ 62. Ke3 Rc3+ 63. Kd4 Rd3+ 64. Ke5 c3 65. Nd4 is a bit complicated, but Black retains all the winning chances.

**62. Ng3+! Kg4?** The losing move

62... Kh6! 63. Nxe4 c3 64. Ke3 Re1+ 65. Kd3 c2 =  
Or 62... Kg6! 63. Ne4 c3 =

**63. Nxe4 +- NxP 63... Rc2+?**

63... c3 64. Rc7 c2 65. Nf6+ Kf5 66. Nd5 and White can win the c pawn without losing the a3 pawn...66... Rh1 67. Rxc2 Rh2+ 68. Kg3 Rxc2 69. Ne3+

**64. Ke3 Rc1 65. a4!?**

65. Kd2! Ra1 (65... Rg1 66. Ra5 (66. Nxc5) 66... Kf4 67. Nxc5! Rxc5 68. Rxc5 Kxc5 69. a4 {and the Black king is outside of the square of the pawn.})

**65... Re1+**

65... c3 66. Kd3 c2 67. Ra5 Re1 68. Nf6+ Kf4 69. Kxc2

**66. Kd4 Kf4 67. Nc3 g4 68. Rf7+ Kg3**

68... Kg5 69. Ne4+ Kg6 70. Rf4!

**69. Kxc4 Kg2 70. a5 g3 71. a6 Rf1?! 72. Rg7?!**

72. Rxf1! The knight will only have to delay black's pawn by a move to win. 72... Kxf1 73. Nd5! Kf2 (73... g2 74. Ne3+ Kf2 75. Nxc2) 74. Nf4 Kf3 75. a7 (75. Nh3 Kg2 76. Ng5)

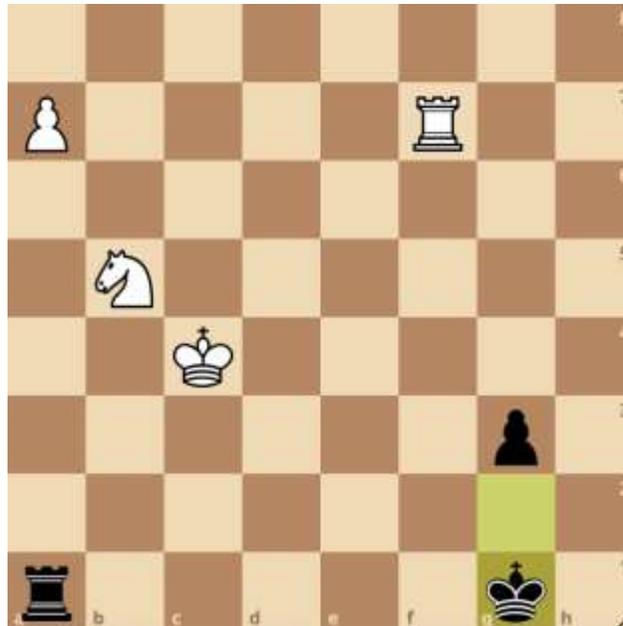
**72... Ra1 73. a7 Kf3 74. Rf7+**

74. Kb5!/? And the threat of Na4 forces 74...Rxa7 75. Rxa7 g2 76. Rg7 Kf2 77. Ne2! +/-

**74... Kg2?**

Impeding the g3 pawn. Better is 74... Ke3 75. Kb5 +/-

**75... Kg1**



**76. Nd4!** Other moves also win, but this is elegant.

The knight and rook combine to stop Black from advancing the g-pawn while holding a7.

**76... g2?**

Now, White forces mate, but there was no hope left since the white knight can just give itself up for the g-pawn, and the king will help queen the a-pawn. 76... Kh2 77. Rh7+ Kg2 78. Ne2 Kf2 79. Nxf3

**77. Ne2+ Kh2**

77... Kh1 78. Rh7#

**78. Rh7#**

**White wins. 1-0**

## **BOB CYR'S COMMENTARY**

Our journey down memory lane with the reporting on the club highlights and the major achievements of our members during the year is nearing its final destination. The road that we traveled in 2024 was certainly one for the history books. The NBCC achieved new goals and shattered long-standing records this year. With these milestones and with our long-established presence on the Connecticut chess stage, our organization, no doubt, continues to proudly be “The Heart of Connecticut Chess.”

But our club's success has not just been limited to merely one or even two years. As I have recounted in the last twenty years with the annual club newsletters, our family has grown into one of the finest institutions for chess in the state and beyond. Since 2005, we have seen the greatest expansion of our club's social network; we have been fortunate to have had the biggest surge in our club's scholastic outreach programs; we have made our presence known worldwide with its state-of-the-art website; and we have had the most significant preservation, promotion, and documentation of our club's history ever. Now those have been the pillars of our success in the last twenty years.

However, our club, as noted throughout my stories, has had its share of challenges. We have faced financial hardships, relocations, and membership turnovers. Despite these challenges, which were tackled, the club came out stronger and better than ever. This is because of our steadfast leadership and devoted team of volunteers, who, with their unwavering desire and determination, ensured that our club would never falter.

One of the things that I have enjoyed about our club is the variety of activities that are held for the benefit of our members. Starting with the early years of the Joseph Mansigian administration, the officers organized new events for the membership. Over the years and in future administrations, other exciting events were added to the club's schedule of activities. With the exception of the annual city championship, which ended in 2006 because of the introduction of the Strazdins Cup, our club officials kept our heritage events like the club championship and the Summer Open alive and intact.

The pilot of the annual club newsletter in 2005 was supposed to be something that I wanted to write for a while. Prior to 2005, the club's history was a collection of e-mails and newspaper clippings and tournament results. I felt that our club's history should be communicated in a more structured, concise format. I also made it a point to focus on the major highlights of the year and recognize some of the major achievements earned by our members. I could never, in a million years, cover every little detail. As the years progressed, my annual newsletters blossomed into mini-stories, which provided an interesting insight into our club. And over the next three to six years, I started adding photos, trivia, FM Richard Bauer's best game of the year, and much more to add spice to these amazing reports.

It has been the honor of my life to be your club historian. I was officially nominated to this position in 2010 when I left the club vice presidency, but as many of you know, my historical work for the club dates back to the publication of the first newsletter and the maintenance of the club archives starting in 2005. People have often asked what motivates me to continue doing this amazing historical work for the club. I guess that it is my passion for writing. It is true that I have the writer's bug! It all started with my love for weather forecasting in high school (thus the references to the weather reports in my work!). This desire for writing continued in college and through my involvement with Toastmasters, a public speaking organization.

Well, friends, this is the conclusion of my year-end commentary. Sadly, as with any newsletter, there must be an end. But before I bid you a fond farewell, I want to stress the importance of how history can play a vital role in predicting the future. If there is anything that I have learned through my incredible work with NBCC legends like the late Arkadijs Strazdins, Andris Strazdins, and Joseph Mansigian, it is always to never give up. Do what you are good at. Being the club historian is not work for me; it is a labor of love. I plan to continue my work as "The Great Communicator" in the club for many more years. Despite our many ideological and political differences, the people in our club have always come together in the common bond of chess and social interaction.

And, with that, I extend my heartfelt wishes to you and your family for a spirited and lovely Christmas season and the blessings of tidings and joy and prosperity in the New Year. The world is a brighter place because of people like you. Please, during these difficult times, take care of yourself and each other.

Thank you for the privilege of your time. May God bless you and your family. And may God bless the NBCC.

President: Suhas Kodali  
Vice President: Justin Lalor  
Secretary: Mario Guevara-Rodriguez  
Treasurer: David Herscovici  
Website Admin: Gert Hilhorst  
Historian: Bob Cyr



**SPECIAL ADDITION!**  
**NBCC HISTORY TRIVIA**  
**TWO DECADES OF MEMORIES: 2005 – 2024**

The last two decades have been one of the most incredible, successful, and memorable periods in the history of the NBCC. So much has been accomplished in our club and by our members, and there can be no doubt that these achievements have had an indelible impact on our thriving organization.

To commemorate the club's twentieth anniversary of the annual newsletters, I am creating a special trivia section with ten questions to test your knowledge and see how well you remember some of the club's biggest highlights in the last twenty years. Maybe you have what it takes to be an assistant club historian. Good luck! The answers are on page 50.

1. Who has won or tied for first place in the New Britain Summer Open Chess Championship the most times?
  - a. Derek Meredith
  - b. Arkadijs Strazdins
  - c. Richard Bauer
  - d. Nelson Castaneda
  
2. How many presidents have served the club in the last twenty years?
  - a. 4
  - b. 5
  - c. 6
  - d. 7
  
3. For the first three years of the club's annual Oktoberfest tournament, the club's annual Oktoberfest dinner party was held after the tournament at what venue?
  - a. J. Timothy's Taverne
  - b. Wood 'N Tap
  - c. East Side Restaurant
  - d. Corner Pug
  
4. Which of these milestones in club history did not occur in 2018?
  - a. First Knockout and Swiss chess tournament held at club
  - b. GM Aleksandr Lenderman's lecture and simul held at club
  - c. Planet Earth Chess Championship held at Hall High School
  - d. John Baclawski's memorial tournament held at club

5. Approximately how many years did the club hold meetings at the Assyrian Community Center?
  - a. 4.5
  - b. 5
  - c. 5.5
  - d. 6
  
6. The person to travel the farthest to play in a chess tournament at the club was from what country?
  - a. Netherlands
  - b. China
  - c. Mexico
  - d. India
  
7. In what year was the first match held between the NBCC and the Chess Club of Fairfield County?
  - a. 2007
  - b. 2009
  - c. 2011
  - d. 2013
  
8. Which of these membership achievements is not currently true?
  - a. Danny Rozovsky is the youngest club champion
  - b. Samantha Aiyathurai earns the biggest upset in standard play
  - c. Alexander Ruth gains the most established rating points in one calendar year
  - d. Dennis Prawira becomes the highest-rated provisional player
  
9. Who was the first honorary veteran member chess tournament held for by the club?
  - a. Anthony Yablonski
  - b. Andris Strazdins
  - c. Ed Valauskas
  - d. William Dworski
  
10. Which of the following was discussed at the 2022 NBCC business meeting?
  - a. Introducing the new club bylaws
  - b. Mentioning of the first Grand Prix contest
  - c. Using PayPal for online tournament registrations
  - d. Forming a tournament directing committee

# SOLUTION AND ANSWERS TO CHESS PUZZLE AND TRIVIA

## CHESS PUZZLE (from cover page)

1. Nd6+ Kd8
2. Qe8+ Nxe8
3. Nf7#

## CHESS TRIVIA (from page 21)

1. d
2. a
3. c
4. d

## SPECIAL ADDITION! CHESS TRIVIA: 2005 – 2024: (from pages 48 and 49)

1. c {Richard Bauer has won or tied for first place in the Summer Open eleven times.}
2. b {Joseph Mansigian, Mike Pascetta, Derek Meredith, Norman Burtness, and Suhas Kodali have been our club presidents in the last twenty years.}
3. c {The East Side Restaurant is a popular German restaurant in New Britain.}
4. a {The first NBCC Knockout and Swiss Tournament held at the club was in 2016.}
5. a {The club held its meetings at the Assyrian Community Center from March 2010 until September 2014.}
6. d {Suhas Kodali's cousin, Priyanka Nutakki, a resident of India, was the person to travel the farthest to play an event in our club.}
7. c {The Chess Club of Fairfield County won the match over the NBCC in 2011 by a score of 13 to 11.}
8. c {David Mashkov gains most the established rating points in one year, which he did in 2023.}
9. d {The William Dworski Memorial Chess Tournament was held in 2010.}
10. b {The ideas for the club Grand Prix contest were created by Richard Bauer and Bob Cyr.}