

NEW BRITAIN CHESS CLUB

"THE HEART OF CONNECTICUT CHESS"

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2026 NEWSLETTER

by Robert Cyr

THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

JANUARY

It is a new year and a new dawn and chapter for the NBCC family. But before I dive into the happenings at the club, I, as club historian, am taking this grand blessed opportunity to report to our entire family and the Connecticut chess community that on January 13, our esteemed president, USCF NM Suhas Kodali, and his wife, Anitha, welcomed the birth of their first child – a beautiful baby girl named Anya. Congratulations to the new father and mother! We wish them and their bundle of joy all the best of health and happiness in their new life together. What a joyous and special way to usher in 2026 for them and the club!

Back at the club, we started 2026 with a very significant highlight – master classes on the second, third, and fourth Saturdays by IM Jan van de Mortel. The IM delivered very engaging two-hour classes each evening, with the focus on reviewing games from the world-renowned Tata Steel Chess Championship in the Netherlands, followed by analysis of games from the 2026 club championship in progress. Jan is one of the top ranked chess players in Connecticut, and it was so wonderful to hear him share his chess experiences throughout his illustrious career. Even though the classes were geared toward class A and higher rated players, there were some lower-rated players who joined the group to listen and learn from one of the state's elite chess players. Thanks, Jan! And thanks to Suhas for organizing these classes.

On January 26, the club celebrated a very special day in its long-established history. It was 125 years ago (exactly half of the years of our nation's existence) that our vibrant organization was founded by Judge John Kirkham. That is incredible! You might recall that Bob Cyr found our club's founding date in the *Hartford Courant* when he was researching our club's earliest days. Way to go, Bob! Although there were no formal festivities planned for our club's milestone anniversary date, Bob did report this amazing and historic news to the membership. Here's to the next 125 years for the NBCC!

FEBRUARY

Every Presidents Day in the quaint, cozy town of Parsippany in north-central New Jersey, chess enthusiasts gather at the Hilton hotel to compete in the holy grail of chess – the largest team chess tournament in history – the World Amateur Team Chess Championship. With a record over 330 teams this year, this tournament was directed by Mr. E. Steven Doyle, who is one of the most iconic and legendary chess organizers in America. This huge tournament attracts players from as young as age five to as old as age ninety and attracts players from all skills from beginner to grandmaster. For the past twenty years, with the exception of the year this event was held online due to covid, NBCC teams have represented at this grand event. This year, the club fielded two all-four player teams and one three-quarter player scholastic team. Without further ado, here were some of the highlights.

On the first adult team, NBCC Legends, we had veteran USATE players FM Richard Bauer, USCF NM James Nitz, Doug Fiske, and John Nitz. Unfortunately, FM Nelson Castaneda was supposed to be on this team but had to withdraw due of illness. Despite two very hard losses on day one, this team fought back with a vengeance to win their next four matches. Of historic note, James swept all of his opponents, going 6-0, and became only the fifth member from our family to earn a perfect score at USATE. Way to go, Kramnitz! On the second adult team, Pickled Pawn Pushers, we had Ian Wohlhieter, Bob Cyr, Dan Knowles, and David Fusco. This team also struggled in the early rounds but came back to earn 2.5 match points. The top boards were challenging as expected. Bob and Ian played their best, as did Dan and David. Unfortunately, Bob was scoreless in this event (he would never mention that of anyone else except himself) and was disappointed with his results, but he was a still a great team player and friend to his fellow teammates. Dan, who is on a hot streak lately and played in his first USATE, dominated in his games and clinched five wins. Lastly, this team tried out for the Best Costume/Gimmick prize on Sunday night (day 2) with their funny pickle costumes but did not receive enough claps from the audience. Even though this team did not win the contest, they were interviewed by a local chess personality, Chess Master Ken, who published the video on YouTube. Finally, the nearly all-NBCC scholastic team, Checkmated Kings, Hikura Flin, we had all USATE newbies Jack Qian, Luca Festa, Calliste Herve-Mignucci, and Liam Cheng. The all-star kids team performed very well and ended up with 3.5 match points. The kids are certainly doing well these days, and one of the days, they will all become experts or masters. Speaking of the youths, David Mashkov and Brian Dai from the club also competed on separate teams and did quite well, winning 3.5 and 4.5 of their games, respectively. Outstanding job, young men!

But the winner of the Top Connecticut Team prize this year was not earned by a NBCC-affiliated team. It was won by the team Best by Test, with member Joe Bihlmeyer as a solid board four player. Rounding the other three boards were Jamison Kao (who is Hong Kong's number one chess player!) and experts Michael Uwakwe and Matt Chan. Best by Test took home the coveted prize of best in state with 4.5 match points and will receive a beautiful plaque. Also of note, Richard Hardin of the club took home the biggest upset of round one (650 rating points).

Beyond the competition, it was nice to engage in social activity with teammates between rounds at restaurants. Bob's team enjoyed reliving great USATE and NBCC stories with drinks at Ruth's Christ Steakhouse. On Sunday evening, David Fusco and Bob joined John and James Nitz and James' wife for a delicious meal at Seasons 52 in Parsippany. Good times and great family. This is what USATE is all about.

My friends, I want to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Doyle again for his labor of love and devotion to USATE. Not only is he an excellent organizer and director, but he has also devoted a lifetime of service to chess to this great country of ours. He is a great chess advocate, leader, promoter, and dear friend. Incidentally, Mr. Doyle was a member of the NBCC way back in the day when he used to work in the Greater Hartford area. Thanks, Mr. Doyle, for making the NBCC family feel right at home at USATE.

Finally, if you have never had experienced USATE, you must put it on your bucket list. Until next year, everyone, I will see you all at USATE – same time, same place, same station, same club historian. Have a wonderful, blessed year.

Historically, the Tuesday after the World Amateur Team event, the club has held a one-week break from the club championship, which I will report on later. This year, the club continued its series of rated blitz tournaments on the day after USATE. The turnout, as expected, was lower than normal. Many of the players in the team tournament were just too exhausted to play a fourth day of chess in a row! But that did not stop David Mashkov, who not only played in USATE but gave a lecture on the night of the blitz tournament and ended up winning it with a perfect score. Talk about endurance! David is becoming a real tough competitor at blitz, now having won or tied for first place seven times in the last twelve NBCC blitz events. He is unstoppable!

IM Jan van de Mortel concluded his master class series at the club on February 21. The master started the evening by paying a tribute to the late GM Jan Timman, one of Jan's former colleagues and friends, who passed away recently. GM Timman was one the strongest Dutch chess players since former World Chess Champion Max Euwe. Jan reviewed some of Mr. Timman's games, including Jan's draw with him in a Dutch league match. Later that evening, Jan switched gears and analyzed some of the games from USATE played by Bob Cyr and FM Richard Bauer. Particularly, Jan noticed a pattern in why Bob lost all of his games! Bob is keeping that a secret! Sorry, folks. Jan made note of a nice endgame in one of Rick's games and complemented him on his play. Jan concluded the master class with his best professional career game – a win against the late GM Gildardo Garcia in the Tata Steel Chess Championship decades ago. Thanks again to the IM for his gracious time and energy for his amazing classes. We hope for more of these in the future at the club, and we hope that Jan will return to the chess scene very soon and become a GM!

Our club's first classical tournament of 2026 took place over eight weeks (seven Tuesdays and a week break for USATE). The event was directed by the club's most senior TD based on age, Mark Bourque, who had huge assistance from TD Coordinator Roger Bessette and seasoned TD Bob Cyr. This was a two-sectioned heritage event, with a championship section for players rated 1600 or higher (but players rated between 1400 and 1599 had the option of playing up) and a candidates or reserve section for players rated under 1600. Throughout the event, there were many intense but lively battles. And some, like the round six match between FM Nelson Castaneda and Miles Griffin, had to be postponed and played a week after the scheduled round. Thanks to Nelson for agreeing to play his make-up game with Miles. Incidentally, Nelson drove all the way to New Jersey to meet Miles for this crucial game, a historical first! This pivotal game would determine who would advance in the leaderboard. Nelson drew his match with Miles and won his final match, thus securing a solid first place for him in the championship, marking his thirteenth championship title. Blazing the candidates section was Dan Knowles, marking the second time that he has won this section. Overall, it was a very nice but, as expected, long duration event, which attracted a record fifty-nine members.

MARCH

The club was slated to commence its first meeting in March, the unofficial start to spring, on the third, but it had to cancel its activities due to hazardous road conditions caused by freezing rain. Therefore, the first official meeting of March was held on the tenth, with a simultaneous chess exhibition by club champion FM Nelson Castaneda. Prior to the simul, the professor presented a very fine lecture of selected games from the final round of the club championship. The simul drew a respectable turnout, with twenty-six players, ranging in age from eight to eighty-six and ranging in rank from novice to expert, taking on the master. The competitors really put the full court pressure on Nelson, slowing him down and making him think long and hard! The simul started at 7:25 p.m. and ended at ten minutes before midnight, with the penultimate game of the night between Nelson and Dennis Himes (the only winner who prevailed against Nelson). There were, however, twelve draws earned (maybe a club record) against Nelson. Those who drew Nelson were Mark Bourque, Oishik De, Mark Krechet, David Mashkov, Krystian Tkaczewski Sr., Yonatan Axelrad, Arya Shah, Prahmarsh Varada, Drew Hetherington, Brian Dai, Calliste Herve-Mignucci, and Krystian Tkaczewski Jr. We thank the master for hosting this simul and thank the participants for competing in this annual event.

The club continued its fun, casual month of March with a team tournament. Ten four-player teams were formed. Pairings were determined on team performance, like at USATE. It was a delight to see some familiar faces who we have not seen in quite a while, like prior club presidents Norman Burtness and USCF NM Derek Meredith, join into this incredible, unique event. Due to time constraints, there were only three rounds for the team event. Taking hold the gold was the team comprised of David Mashkov, Dennis Himes, Arya Shah, and Panagiotis Poursaitidis, which earned three match points.

Lastly, before the club's next major tournament, we held another rated blitz chess event. That evening, Prahmarsh Varada was scheduled to give the lecture, but he had to cancel due to illness. Suhas then had Bob ask Joe Bihlmeyer, our club's head coach, to lecture in Prahmarsh's place, but he also was ill! So then, Suhas asked David Mashkov, and he enthusiastically agreed. And after his lecture, David dominated the blitz event, claiming first place in a field of thirty-three players. David is an amazing, talented young man on and off the chess board, and he is an asset and a great friend to the club. Way to go, champion!

APRIL

The second classical tournament hosted by the club in 2026 was the Winner's Keepers event. This year, the tournament was named the Castaneda-Axelrad-Pandey Chess Tournament since these members each won their respective sections of this event in 2025. Sixty-two players showed up for this year's exciting tournament, which set a new club record. This was a four-week tournament in a Swiss format. The club continues to see many youths competing in our events, and this tournament was no exception. Winning the Castaneda section, and now marking a milestone for his fortieth win or tie in classical tournaments in the club, was FM Richard Bauer. It should be noted that Rick won on tie-breaks in a four-way tie for first place because he was the only player to not take a half-point bye among the other three winners who earned three points each. Consequently, half-point byes do not count toward tie-break points. Claiming first place in the Axelrad section was Arya Shah, who earned his first win in a major club tournament. And lastly, winning the Pandey section was Rishaan Negi, who is one of the club's youngest members. So, next year, the Winner's Keepers event will be the Bauer-Shah-R.Negi Chess Tournament.

For two weeks in April, FM Richard Bauer, one of the club's most senior and experienced and knowledgeable chess instructors, reviewed games from the recent Candidates Tournament, an elite event to determine who will challenge World Chess Champion Gukesh Dommaraju later this year for the prestigious title. Rick's focus during his lecture was on the games of Javokhir Sindarov, who is one of the youngest players ever to play in this tournament. Thanks to Rick for his in-depth analysis and commentary and for his constant contributions to the club. He is truly an asset to our organization.

A milestone occurred at the club at the last meeting in April when we welcomed our one-hundredth member. There are still four months remaining in the club's fiscal year, so we might get close to reaching the 119 membership mark, which was the record set back in 1973 during the Bobby Fischer boom. The club continues to grow and reach new heights, most notably seeing a record surge in scholastic membership, which comprises close to half of our membership.

MAY

The month of May and the first week in June was slated for the club's third classical tournament of the year – the Strazdins Cup / Stein. This event has been held for many years in tribute to two of the greatest contributors in the club's history, lifetime members Arkadijs and Andris Strazdins. The turnout for this historic event was impressive, with fifty-four players of all ages and skills competing, tying last year's record. Winning the Strazdins Cup (open to players 1400 or higher) was one of our longest-standing members, FM Richard Bauer, who knew Arkadijs back in the 80s and 90s. Winning the Strazdins Stein (under 1600 section) was new member Mahesh Mahabaleshwar. This was Mahesh's first win in a major NBCC tournament. The club remembers Arkadijs and Andris Strazdins for their many years of devoted service. May their memory and legacy never be forgotten.

JUNE

The club's first milestone of June was its annual Planet Earth Chess Championship, which was held at the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection and which was organized and directed by Bob Cyr this year since USCF NM Suhas Kodali was regrettably unable to perform these duties. Upon the advice from Suhas about how to successfully plan and coordinate this prestigious event, Bob took the initiative and assembled an all-star team of volunteers to ensure that this event would run as smoothly as possible. Bob sincerely thanks David Fusco, Mario Guevara-Rodriguez, Estee and Yonatan Axelrad, David Mashkov, Natalia Perekopskaya (Mashkov's mother), Lisa Yang (Brian Dai's mother), and Roger Bessette for their incredible work and assistance. For lunch, players were treated to a variety of meat and vegetable pizzas from Tony's Central Pizza, various delicious salads prepared by Estee, and cookies and beverages. The tournament was separated into three sections, with the open section playing four rounds at G/45; d/5 and with the lower sections playing five rounds at G/25; d/5. Forty-five chess warriors of Planet Earth competed in the event, mostly from Connecticut but a few from Massachusetts. After a long day of spirited action on the sixty-four squares, FM Nelson Castaneda clinched first place to win the coveted title of Planet Earth Chess Champion. In the U1600 section, Robbie Jay took home the top prize. And, in the scholastic section (U1000), which was a lower-than-expected turnout, Raphael Tikranian was the number one finisher. Overall, this historic event was one of the most successfully run events in club history. Incidentally, this was the second-highest turnout for Planet Earth.

Every June, usually at the second meeting, the club holds its annual business meeting. At this important session, there is an election of officers for the upcoming fiscal year in September, along with presentations from some of the officers and the historian on the operational, financial, and historical state of the organization.

This year, thirty-four members attended this meeting, which lasted almost two hours and which was one of the most engaging, with many members offering suggestions on club matters and many members willing to step-up and volunteer.

The first order of business was a review of the prior year's minutes by USCF NM Suhas Kodali and Mario-Guevara Rodriguez. After the minutes were approved, the meeting continued as follows:

Historian's Report – Bob Cyr

1. The historian reported on the major club highlights of 2026 so far.
2. The historian gave an update on the Grand Prix and Best Game of the Year contests.
3. The historian made an announcement about his plans to donate to the club annually and hold his fortieth anniversary party in 2027.
4. The historian presented graphs illustrating membership trends, demographics, and Summer Open tournament attendance.

President's Report – USCF NM Suhas Kodali

1. The president recognized the indispensable role of club volunteers, with special acknowledgement to Estee and Yonatan Axelrad for consistently opening the club every Tuesday and to Roger Bessette for ensuring optimal playing conditions for every Tuesday tournament and for serving as TD coordinator.
2. The president expressed gratitude to volunteers who support outreach programs at local town libraries.
3. The president announced that he would not seek re-election for the 2026-2027 year and thanked the membership for their support throughout his tenure.

Treasurer's Report – USCF NM David Herscovici

1. The treasurer presented a detailed and comprehensive financial report for 2026, covering revenues, expenses, assets, liabilities, and net worth.
2. The treasurer noted a positive change in unrestricted net worth in the last year and noted that there have been many generous donations from members and supporters.
3. The treasurer said that the club has never been more financially sound.
4. The treasurer talked about the prompt and consistent rent payments to our landlord.

Election of Officers – September 1, 2026 – August 31, 2027

The following members were elected to serve the club for the 2026-2027 fiscal year:

President: David Fusco

Vice President: Roger Bessette

Treasurer: David Herscovici

Secretary: Mario Guevara-Rodriguez

Prior to the vote for president, Norman Burtness asked President-elect Fusco to share his vision for the NBCC. Mr. Fusco expressed his intent to maintain continuity, remain in the role for the long-term, and take a deliberate approach to reviewing the club's mission before introducing any significant changes.

New Business

1. CSCA Membership Renewal
 - a. Multiple members, including Gert Hilhorst and David Maskhov, spoke to the benefits of maintaining CSCA membership.
2. Social Media and Club Visibility
 - a. A motion was raised to increase the club's presence on social media.
 - b. Additional suggestions included distributing branded NBCC merchandise to promote club identity such as pens and t-shirts and hats.
3. Additional Meetings and Programming
 - a. FM Nelson Castaneda proposed the addition of a second weekly club session dedicated to training. He also suggested using DGT chess boards to broadcast live coverage of top tournament games.

4. TD Compensation
 - a. Suhas raised the possibility of providing compensation to tournament directors. A rich exchange of input from current TDs followed.
5. Annual Membership Dues
 - a. Following discussion, Suhas recommended maintaining the current dues structure.
6. Skittles Room Setup
 - a. Suhas, Roger, and Estee noted the positive impact of relocating tables and chess boards to the foyer area for informal play, reducing disruption in the main tournament room.

Recognition of Outgoing President

1. David Hersovici offered warm and heartfelt recognition of club President Suhas Kodali's eight years of service on the executive board. He served two years as club vice president prior to being elected president. Under Suhas' leadership:
 - a. The club's financial resources grew substantially.
 - b. Weekly lectures and training sessions were introduced every Tuesday.
 - c. Youth participation and the number of young players increased.
 - d. Support for community outreach programs expanded.
 - e. Volunteer engagement across all club activities grew significantly.

The club concluded its first half of the year with its 3rd annual Generations Championship, where players were grouped into sections based on age. The sections were Play Time (under age 18), Prime Time (ages 18 to 49), and Out of Time (ages 50 or older). This unique event gives the senior adults, young to middle-aged adults, and the scholastic players a chance to compete within their peers. FM Richard Bauer won the senior section again, as he did in the prior two years. John Twombly won the young to middle-aged adult section. The scholastic sections were broken into two different rating sections. Winning the advanced scholastic section (1400+) was Calliste Herve-Mignucci, and winning the U1400 scholastic section was Oishik De. Both Calliste and Oishik clinched their first major tournament win in the tournament for their first place standings in the event.

JULY

During the months of July and August, the club's schedule transitions into more casual activities, primarily due to the fact that many of our members take summer breaks and attendance is lighter. However, we still get decent turnouts for tournaments during these months.

On the first week of July, the club held another blitz event, which, since 2013, have been rated by the USCF. Traditionally, the format for these tournaments have been one or two big open sections. For this event, however, FM Nelson Castaneda created interesting ideas to have players grouped into six-player sections based on their close proximity in rating. This made the tournament fairer and more competitive. Someone, though, still had to be the underdog in each section, but the disparity in rating from the highest-rated player to the lowest-rated player in each section was generally no greater than two hundred points (one rating class), with some exceptions of course. Ironically, in four of the sections, the lowest-ranked player took home first place. Go figure! After an evening of spirited and lively action on the sixty-four squares, the following people won their respective sections of this event with the new format, which will be the standard going forward. The champions were: Section 1: Praharsh Varada, Section 2: Jack Qian and Mark Bourque, Section 3: Mahesh Mahabaleshwar, Section 4: Mark Krechet, Section 5: Rishaan Negi, and Section 6: Venkata Shola.

For the remainder of July, the club held its 20th annual quick championship. This tournament had the greatest number of rounds for any event held during the club year – eleven spanning over a three-week period. A club record forty-nine players participated in this event, which tied the record set back in 2024, for the most people competing in a quick event in the club. As usual, there were players of all ages and skills in action, the makings for fun times. The tournament has been historically won by our masters, especially FM Nelson Castaneda, but this year, scholastic superstar Jack Qian dominated the field and took home the gold with an impressive score of nine points out of a possible eleven. Jack is just one many of the club's youths who are incredibly talented, and he has a very bright future ahead of him in the dynamic world of chess.

Before we say goodbye to July, I would like to thank USCF NM Suhas Kodali and Estee Axelrad for working together to purchase pens with the club logo on them for promotional purposes. This is a great idea! Let us spread the word about our amazing organization!

NBCC PICTURE GALLERY

The following photos were taken by James Nitz, Jason Qian,
Roger Bessette, Suhas Kodali, and Bob Cyr.

WORLD AMATEUR TEAM CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP 2026



John Nitz, Doug Fiske, James Nitz, and Richard Bauer



David Fusco, Ian Wohlhieter, Bob Cyr, and Dan Knowles



Calliste Herve-Mignucci, Liam Cheng, Jack Qian, and Luca Festa

NBCC CHAMPIONS OF 2026
(WITH TDS MARK BOURQUE, ROGER BESSETTE, AND BOB CYR)



Benjamin Fields, Jithya Sajeevan, Roger Bessette, David Mashkov, Calliste Herve-Mignucci, David Herscovici, Dan Knowles, Nelson Castaneda, Mark Bourque, Mahanth Chede, Krystian Tkaczewski Sr., Mark Krechet, Bob Cyr, Tom Sullivan, Drew Hetherington, Praharsh Varada, Arya Shah, Oishek De, and Nick Hudyma

SIMULTANEOUS CHESS EXHIBITION OF 2026
BY NELSON CASTANEDA



Nelson makes his move against the candidates champ!



Nelson in deep thought against the only simul winner!

STRAZDINS CUP – STEIN CHAMPIONS OF 2026
(WITH PRESIDENT SUHAS KODALI AND TDS)



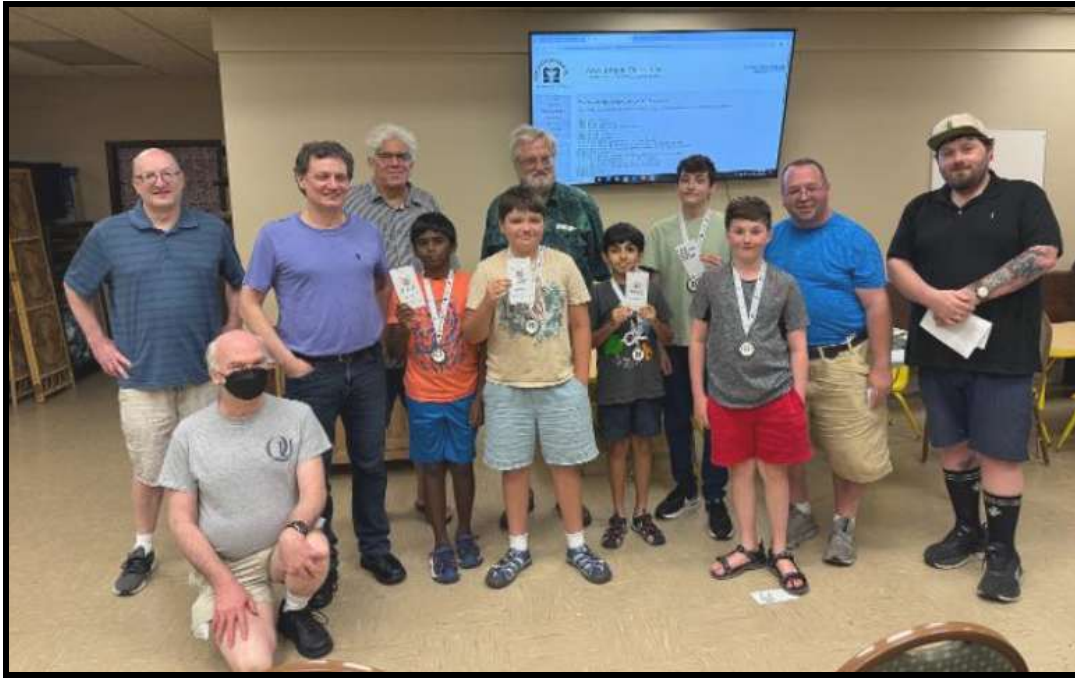
BACK ROW: Panagiotis Poursaitidis, Arya Shah, Richard Bauer, Nelson Castaneda, Bob Cyr,
Nick Hudyma, John Twombly, and Mahesh Mahabaleshwar
FRONT ROW: Roger Bessette, Suhas Kodali, David Herscovici, and Gert Hilhorst

PLANET EARTH CHESS CHAMPION OF 2026 (WITH TD BOB CYR)



Nelson Castanda and Bob Cyr

NBCC GENERATIONS CHAMPIONS OF 2026
(WITH VP DAVID FUSCO AND TD ROGER BESSETTE)



BACK ROW: Roger Bessette, Nelson Castaneda, Richard Bauer, Panagiotis Poursaitidis, John Twombly, and David Fusco
FRONT ROW: David Herscovici, Joe Bihlmeyer, Sarvesh Ganesh, Mark Krechet, Yashas Bhatsoori, and Wesley Needham

NBCC QUICK CHAMPIONS OF 2026 (WITH TD ROGER BESSETTE)



Roger Bessette, Calliste Herve-Mignucci, Jack Qian, Mark Krechet, Drew Hetherington,
Nick Sitro, Brian Dai, Nelson Castaneda, David Fusco, and Aayush Negi

NBCC MEMBERS' MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

The following major achievements were earned by our members at non-club tournaments and in the USCF in 2026.

NBCC MEMBER ATTAINING THE LEVEL OF USCF EXPERT

Miles Griffin, who just joined the club in early 2026, became a USCF expert.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT NBCC MEMBER ACHIEVEMENTS

The following members earned the top middle school and elementary school titles, respectively, at the 2026 Connecticut State Scholastic Chess Championships held in Fairfield on January 11: Krystian Tkaczewski Jr. and Brian Dai.

FM Nelson Castaneda tied for second place in the 2026 New York State Senior Chess Championship held in Saratoga Springs from February 28 to March 1.

The following members won first place in their respective grade section in the 2026 Connecticut Scholastic Grade Chess Championships held in Greenwich on March 1:

- Rishaan Negi: 1st grade prize
- Krystian Tkaczewski Jr.: 6th grade prize
- Jack Qian: 7th grade prize
- Nihal Bala Gowda: 7th grade prize (second place)

FM Nelson Castaneda won first place in the 2026 Massachusetts Senior Open Chess Championship held in Marlborough on April 25 and 26.

FM Nelson Castaneda tied for second place in the 2026 New York State Open Chess Championship held in Lake George between June 19 and 21.