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THE K-12 GRADES

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FEBRUARY 2024

CHESS LIFE Kids

4 IN SESSION **The Alapin**

BY JOHN HARTMANN

8 CHESS STORIES **What Type of Chess Player are YOU?**

BY AL LAWRENCE

12 COVER STORY

MY CHESS COMMUNITY

BY NATE SHUMAN

15 TACTICS TUNEUP

16 INSTRUCTION **Get TUF!**

BY TIM MCGREW

18 PUZZLE ME THIS, PUZZLE ME THAT

BY JEFF COAKLEY

20 CHESS ADVENTURES **Evelyn Mills**

ART BY NICOLAS BARRIOS

21 TOURNAMENT LIFE

23 SOLUTIONS



ON THE COVER

The 2023 K-12 Grade Championships were HUGE! More than 2,300 players from around the country came to Orlando to test their skills, and while not everyone could take home a medal (like our cover subject, Kindergarten champ Mehmet Yilanli!) we know that everyone made memories they'll never forget.

PHOTO: CAROLINE KING / US CHESS

THE CHESS COMMUNITY

LOOKING BACK AFTER THE K-12 GRADE CHAMPIONSHIPS

BY NATE SHUMAN

I'M ON THE plane, heading home after competing at my last National K-12 Grade Championships in Orlando, Florida. My team, The Dalton School, won the 12th Grade Championship, its 11th national grade title. Looking back at my 13 years of scholastic chess, however, it's not the trophies or celebrations I remember — it's the hard work, the friendships, and

community relationships that have helped me grow most.

I fell in love with chess in all of its complexity at Dalton. Under the guidance of David MacEnulty and WIM Beatriz Marinello, its infinite possibilities began to reveal themselves to me and my fellow teammates. More than 70 Dalton players, from age five to 18, filled our team room this year in Orlando, and with our parents and coaches, it felt like a warm chess village.

New York City has a vibrant scholastic chess community. My chess friends and I have grown up together, at camps, tournaments, and Nationals. I remember moves and games, but more than that, I remember eating homemade dumplings, pierogies, and samosas made by chess parents from all over the world. I remember classrooms turned into team rooms where coaches

and older teammates would review games between rounds, celebrating our wins, consoling our losses, and sometimes just throwing a ball around to help us reset our brains.

I remember magical blitz and bughouse sessions, played with friends and foes from around the country, going deep into the night at Nationals. Over the years I bonded with some of my strongest peers, including titled players like IM Gus Huston, my Dalton teammate. I played on World Youth teams in South Africa and Greece, and at the U.S. Chess School in St. Louis, rigorous study and intense blitz were capped off with a cannonball contest in the hotel pool.

Because a game of chess is contested between two players, it's



Left: Ryan Peterson, Gus Huston, and Nate Shuman with their team trophy. Right: A young Nate representing Team USA!





easy to overlook the relationships that develop in chess. Coaches and players come to know each other over time, supporting each other when it's needed most. Learning how to be a good mentor, teammate, and friend inspired me to start a chess peer mentorship program at our school, now with more than 60 participants. I think it's vital for older players to guide the younger ones at scholastic clubs and schools, creating a community that focuses on belonging and not just results.

The mental side of chess is also often overlooked. Finding joy in the game, and in the learning process, is really important. I have found that mindfulness and meditation have helped me better my results and manage my stress, so I created a program called Mindmates to help other players with the mental side of our game, and I have presented my ideas to students and coaches across New York. My chess journey did more than teach me chess; it sparked an intellectual curiosity that led me beyond the squares on the board.

What we learn playing chess

Top: Nate at the U.S. Chess School at the 2016 World Championship, and playing at the World Cadets. Right: Scenes from the 2023 K-12.

extends into our lives. One of my closest mentors, Russ Makofsky, has taught me this. He leads the Impact Coaching Network, which coaches hundreds of players in New York City, but he uses chess to create community and lift people up. His Gift of Chess program works to bring chess sets to underserved communities around the world.

Everyone is equal at the board, and that's one of the beautiful things about chess. We learn that our actions have consequences. We learn to trust our creativity, to rely on our friends and teammates, and

to give back to our communities. All this from a board game! I will be forever grateful to all



PHOTOS: COURTESY NATE SHUMAN (TOP), US CHESS / CAROLINE KING (KRUSH, BLITZ)

those who have helped me grow in chess — my parents, my coaches, and my friends, of course, but also the tournament directors and staff who put on events like the K-12s. This game has provided me lifelong memories and shaped my values, making me who I am today. ♠

2023 K-12 GRADE CHAMPIONSHIPS AT A GLANCE

ORLANDO, FLORIDA | DECEMBER 15-17, 2023

INDIVIDUAL WINNERS:

12th Grade: IM Max Lu (CT), IM-elect Gus Huston (NY), 6½/7. **11th Grade:** Avi Kaplan (IL), 6½/7. **10th Grade:** CM Marvin Gao (FL), FM Bach Ngo (FL), 6/7. **9th Grade:** IM-Elect Brewington Hardaway (NY), Aiden Reiss (NY), FM Erick Zhao (PA), 6/7. **8th Grade:** Eric Liu, 6½/7. **7th Grade:** Aditeya Das (NY), Andrew Jiang (GA), Bobby Qian (NJ), Vihaan Saxena (NJ), Alexander Sukhiashvili (NJ), 6/7. **6th Grade:** Kyle Wang (TX), 7/7. **5th Grade:** Kyle Dong (NJ), WIM Megan Paragua (NY), Yuvraj Sawhney (CA), Phineas Weingarten (NY), Tariq Yue (PA), Derek Zhang (NY), Glenn Zhang (CA), 6/7. **4th Grade:** Santhosh Ayyappan (NJ), Linxi Zhu (NY), 6½/7. **3rd Grade:** Sasha Schaefer (NY), 6½/7. **2nd Grade:** Samanyu Alluri (MA), Sriansh Katta (NC), 6½/7. **1st Grade:** Mustafa Muhammad (NC), Darren Wu (NY), 6½/7. **Kindergarten:** Mehmet Yilanli (OH), 7/7.

TEAM WINNERS:

12th Grade: Dalton (NY), 17. **11th Grade:** Columbia Grammar & Prep (NY), 16. **10th Grade:** American Heritage (FL), 15½. **9th Grade:** Columbia Grammar & Prep (NY), 16. **8th Grade:** Hunter College (NY), 15. **7th Grade:** Millburn Middle School (NJ), 17. **6th Grade:** Collegiate School (NY), 15½. **5th Grade:** Speyer (NY), 16. **4th Grade:** Speyer (NY), 16½. **3rd Grade:** Oak Hill (FL), 17½. **2nd Grade:** Speyer (NY), 16½. **1st Grade:** Oak Hall (FL), 14. **Kindergarten:** Oak Hall (FL), 14½.

For complete results, visit www.uschess.org/results/2023/k12/