

Happy Birthday George! Welcome to the Hall of Fame

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George Koltanowski

By Eric Hicks

Today should be christened "Kolty Day" by all Bay Area chess players. Today is the birthday of the late and great George Koltanowski one of the true heroes of Bay Area chess.. (1903 - 2000)

To read more about the history of "Kolty" check him out as the latest inductee into the Calchess Hall of Fame here::

[CHESS BIOGRAPHIES!](#)

Kolty is best know worldwide for his amazing memory (at one point he was in the Guinness Book of World Records as "best memory") and his blindfolded chess world record. Kolty played 34 games simultaneously blindfolded back in 1937...a record that still has not officially been broken. One of Kolty's amazing tricks was to play a blindfolded game with 64 squares with audience names written on each of the 64 squares. Before the game Kolty would memorize for 5 minutes all 64 names and which squares they were on. Instead of calling coordinates, the name of the person on the square would be called. Amazingly Kolty was able to play entire games and do his knight's tour blindfolded in this fashion.

Outside of chess playing Kolty made incredible achievements as a promoter and organizer of chess. Calchess fan Sam Sloan labeled him "the greatest showman and promoter that chess has ever known." For the bay area he did amazing things.

As the chess columnist for the SF Chronicle George set records publishing a DAILY column for 52 years until the day of his death. It is estimated that Kolty wrote an amazing 19,000 chess columns for the SF Chronicle! I dont know anyone who even comes close to that record.

In 1957 Kolty brought the US Junior Championship to San Francisco. The tournament was held in a milk dairy in the Mission. This tournament is most famous for the tournament that a 13 year old Bobby Fischer burst into the limelight with a startling performance. Kolty was also instrumental in creating the first ever Cal Chess Scholastic Championship back in 1981.

It was Kolty's dream to have chess classes in every school. More than any one individual, Kolty was an inspiration to old schoolers like Elizabeth Shagnessy and Richard Shorman in doing their first chess classes in Bay Area classrooms. Now, 30 years later, scholastic chess is present in a huge number of Bay Area schools thanks in large part to Kolty and the people he mentored.

I think today Kolty would be proud of the trend he started.

George Koltanowski is survived by his 99 year old wife Leah.