

1300 Kids Descend on San Jose for 31st CalChess Scholastics!

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K-3 Champion James Kwok

"Check." "Check!" "Checkmate!!" Such sounds were heard repeatedly on May 20-21 at the largest annual chess tournament west of the Rocky Mountains. A total of 1298 youngsters arrived at the McEnery Convention Center in San Jose to push pawns and dance with knights. An even larger number of parents, siblings, relatives, friends and coaches shared the joy of victory and the agony of defeat with these aspiring chess masters. The crowd exceeded the expectations of many, including chief organizer Dr. Alan Kirshner, who initially had expected somewhere around 1000 players. In fact, including roughly 30 no-shows and 20 withdrawals, the actual number of entries was closer to 1350!

The participants competed in 11 sections based on age and skill level, ranging from the Kindergarten and K-3 Novice sections to the challenging K-12 Varsity. The younger kids played only five short games on Saturday while those in 4th grade and older had to endure six grueling rounds over two days, each game lasting up to 2.5 hours (3 hours in K-12 Varsity). At the end of the tournament, the 2006 state champions were crowned in each of these 11 divisions. *There were 464 players in K-3, 489 in K-6, 177 in K-8 and 168 in K-12.*

Certainly the most difficult section was the **K-12 Varsity**. A total of four rated masters and nearly 25 players rated over 1800 USCF crossed swords in a royal battle. The level of competition was even superior to that of many local adult tournaments! Surprisingly, there were few upsets among the top players and going into the final round, the leader board showed all four masters tied for first place. Matthew Ho (2282) and Daniel Schwarz (2200) had drawn against each other while Nicolas Yap (2262) and Drake Wang (2206) yielded half points to 4th grade prodigy Daniel Naroditsky (2003) and A player Marvin Shu (1849), respectively. These four masters were so evenly matched that there was no clear favorite, although all eyes were on the defending champion Yap to earn his second straight title.

Thus the stage was set for a classic wild-west shootout in the last round. The pairings were Ho versus Wang and Schwarz against Yap. A large audience gathered in the skittles room to watch the action live on a large video screen, with moves transmitted from the playing hall using sensory boards. Wang slowly outplayed his opponent and then had to watch as Schwarz and Yap fought a complicated battle that ended in favor of the former player. Congratulations to 11th graders **Daniel Schwarz** of Sacramento and **Drake Wang** of San Francisco for sharing top honors in the K-12 Varsity with a score of 5.5 out of 6. The friendly rivalry between Daniel and Drake dates back over eight years to when they finished 1st and 2nd at the 1998 state K-3 championship!

The K-12 Varsity division was also the qualifier for the Denker and Polgar national invitational championships, which will be held this August at the U.S. Open in Chicago. This year's Polgar invitee (top girl score) is 9th grader Louiza Livschitz (1910) who scored 4.0 out of 6. At the time of this writing, the Denker invitation (top high school player) is still up in the air, with co-champions Schwarz and Wang scheduling a match to determine who represents CalChess.

The lower sections were perhaps less dramatic than the high school, but don't tell that to the players who laid it all on the line. The **K-8 Varsity** section saw a trio of 1800 rated 8th graders each seeking to earn the title of state champion. Top seeded **Charles Sun** (1854) led throughout, yielding only a draw with the black pieces in the final round to his closest competitor, Jonathan Soo Hoo (1839). This last round draw allowed third seeded **Davis Xu** (1822) to catch Charles in the standings at 5.5 out of a possible 6. Thanks to vastly superior tiebreaks, Charles Sun walked home with the first place trophy.

More excitement brewed in the **K-6 Varsity** division. Although 5th grader Gregory Young (1870) towered over 200 rating points above the field, he had to swim in shark-infested waters that included two freshly minted national champions. 2nd grader Nicholas Nip (1668) had won the K-3 national title while 5th grader Rahul Desirazu (1557) shared first place in K-5, both just one week earlier at the Bert Lerner National Elementary Championships in Denver. The youthful competition in San Jose did not seem intimidated by these three favorites. Young gave up a draw in the third round against Isaac Zhang, rated 450 points lower. Yet the story of this section was the solid performance by 5th grader Andrew Yeh (1507), who defeated both Nip and Desirazu in consecutive games. Perhaps drained from the excitement of two straight upsets, Yeh lost to the top seed in the final round. Nobody else could get to 5.5 out of 6 and therefore **Gregory Young** earned the outright title of CalChess elementary school champion.

The youngest divisions included competitors that ranged from those who barely knew how the pieces moved to a few who might dream of some day earning the Grandmaster title. Although the quality of chess in the K-3 section does not compare with the high school group, the level of electricity remains just as high. On occasion, the parents and coaches of these youngest also get carried away in the competitiveness of the weekend. The organizer and directing staff reported a variety of difficulties with the youngest kids, ranging from illegal moves (e.g. both kings in check) to players who failed to properly circle the result of the game to parents complaining about the results and pairings to even one parent complaint that escalated into a phone call to San Jose Police! Whatever happened to the saying that "it is just a game?"

When the kids got down to the business of playing chess, the **K-3 Varsity** division became a battle between the top local primary age children. Three players were rated over 1300 and another three were over 1200. However, the surprise champion with a perfect score of 5.0 out of 5 was 3rd grader **James Kwok** of Mission San Jose Elementary School in Fremont, rated just 1135. James defeated two higher rated opponents en route to his victory. Two other players had a chance to share the podium, but top seeded 3rd grader Jerome Sun (1349) could only muster a last round draw against 2nd grader Kyle Shin (1219).

Although much of the emphasis at the state championship falls to determining the cream of the crop in the K-3, K-6, K-8 and K-12 Varsity divisions, roughly 2/3 of the participants in this event played in the Junior Varsity or Novice sections. A total of 550 children entered in the K-3 Novice and K-6 Novice divisions, nearly overwhelming the staff of directors. Another 45 precocious kindergartners and preschoolers, some armed with paper, pencils, wrist watches and cell phones, pushed pawns in the special Kindergarten section. The following table lists the individual champions from each of the 11 sections, including ties for first place in tiebreak order.

Kindergarten: James Du, 5.0/5

K-3 Novice: Travis Pazin, Pranav Lalgudi, Naved Krishnamurthy, Muhammed Akhil Mohideen, Pranav Reddy, Anish Haris and Mark Sui, all 5.0/5

K-3 JV: Jasper Lee, 5.0/5

K-3 Varsity: James Kwok, 5.0/5

K-6 Novice: Alec White, Daniel Tan and Daniel Hoang, all 6.0/6

K-6 JV: Nathaniel Varghese, 6.0/6

K-6 Varsity: Gregory Young, 5.5/6

K-8 JV: Ashkon Farhangi, 6.0/6

K-8 Varsity: Charles Sun and Davis Xu, both 5.5/6

K-12 JV: Jeffrey Inferrera Jr. and Ken Cheng, both 5.5/6

K-12 Varsity: Daniel Schwarz and Drake Wang, both 5.5/6

The 1300 players in the CalChess Scholastic Championships were not just competing for individual honors, but also sought to add their score to their school team's total. With school pride at stake, there is always something to play for! A variety of public and private schools from around northern California were represented, with some winning awards nearly every year. This year's big winner was Mission San Jose Elementary in Fremont, which took first place in three of the six elementary school divisions. Their victories in both the K-3 and K-6 Varsity sections come on the heels of top 5 finishes at the National Elementary Championships in Denver just one week earlier. Kudos to coach Joe Lonsdale for creating a program powerful enough to make waves not just on the local scene but also at nationals! In the older sections, Hopkins Juniors High School won the K-8 division and national power Saratoga High School took first place in the K-12 Varsity.

K-3 Novice: Heather Elementary School and St. Luke's School, both 15.0

K-3 JV: Weibel Elementary School, 14.0

K-3 Varsity: Mission San Jose Elementary School, 15.0

K-6 Novice: Cherrywood School, 20.5

K-6 JV: Mission San Jose Elementary School, 19.0

K-6 Varsity: Mission San Jose Elementary School, 15.5

K-8 JV: Marin County Day School, 20.0

K-8 Varsity: Hopkins Junior High School, 16.0

K-12 JV: Tierra Linda Middle School, 15.5

K-12 Varsity: Saratoga High School, 17.5

The 31st Scholastic Championships represents the best that CalChess has to offer. Not only did the region's top kids participate--many of the top adults served as tournament directors, volunteers and coaches. A big round of applause goes to **organizer Dr. Alan Kirshner** who probably spent many sleepless nights fretting about the 30% increase in the number of players over the expected total. Dr.

Kirshner started organizing this event about a dozen years ago while his own sons were still in school. Over the years the participation has increased from a modest 500 to a record of 1300 players this year (1350 entries). His two right-hand men were **chief floor TD John McCumiskey** and **chief pairings TD Richard Koepcke**. Koepcke actually wore two hats over the weekend since he is also the President of the state chess organizing body, CalChess. The members of the **CalChess Board of Directors** all pitched in to contribute manpower to the tournament. And as in previous years, **Stephanie and Bob Blatt** performed the important roles of herding the **many volunteers** who made this tournament click. Finally, IM Ricardo DeGuzman provided free game analysis through the entire weekend and FM Eric Schiller played a simultaneous exhibition on Saturday evening.

I would like to close this article on a personal note. As a chess coach with students participating in each of the four Varsity sections, I had hoped to bring home one state championship. On Sunday evening, my dream became reality—and then some! First, Gregory Young won the K-6 division outright. Then Charles Sun survived a tough final pairing to win the K-8, finishing first on tiebreaks. The icing on the cake was the victory by my long-time student and friend Daniel Schwarz in the K-12 section. The credit goes to all of the kids who tried their best no matter how difficult the opposition and still maintained a positive attitude. In fact, my last two words to children at a chess tournament are quite simple: "Have fun!"

Crosstables: <http://www.calchessscholastics.org/States2006/RESULTS.html>

Photographs (over 1000!):

John Tu: <http://www.pbase.com/statescholasticset1/calchessstatescholastic>

Mark Shelton: http://www.chessdryad.com/photos/sanjose/sanjose_07m/index.htm

Alan Kirshner: <http://www.CalNorthJuniorChess.org/States06/index.html>

Richard Shorman: http://www.chessdryad.com/photos/sanjose/sanjose_08r/index.htm

Muzhgan Muhtashimi: http://www.chessdryad.com/photos/sanjose/sanjose_10m/index.htm

Michael Aigner: <http://www.calchess.org/modules.php?name=coppermine&file=thumbnails&album=22>

Please see the game file below for top board games from the K-12 Varsity section and also a sample of the best games selected by the K-6, K-8 and K-12 champions.



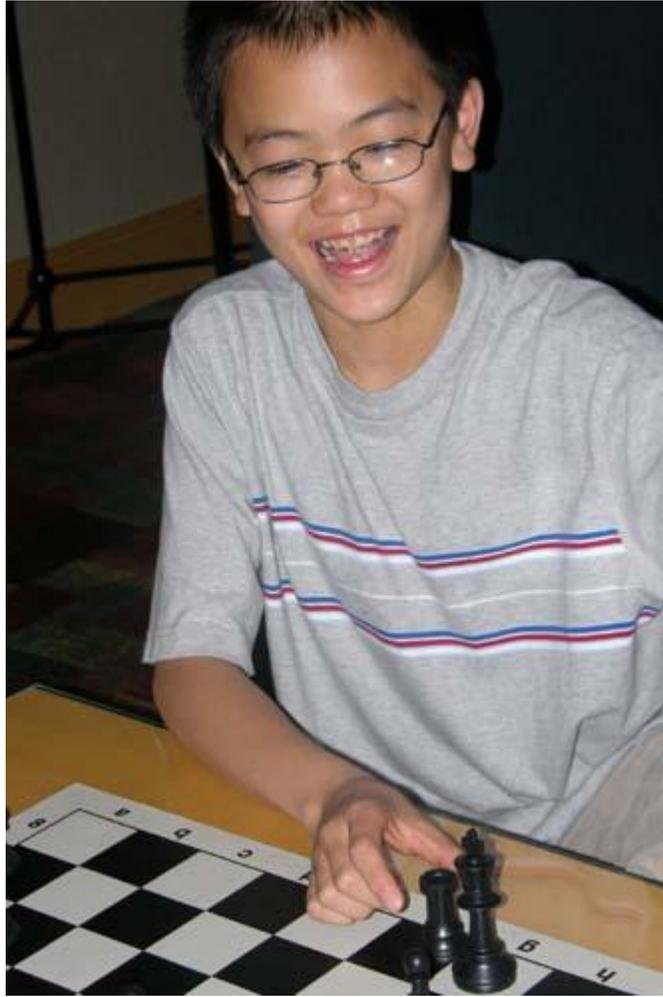
K-12 Co-champion Daniel Schwarz



K-12 Co-champion Drake Wang



K-8 champion Charles Sun



K-6 champion Gregory Young