

# National Elementary School Championships, May 7-9 2010

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by Alan M. Kirshner PhD

Fifty-five Northern Californian chess players traveled to Atlanta, Georgia to compete at the 2010 Burt Lerner National Elementary (K-6) Championships on May 7 through May 9. This was one of the largest contingents of our State's players to ever attend an Elementary School Nationals. California in U.S. Chess Federation terms is divided into two states—North and South. I remember in the early 1990's when my boys went, I was amazed when we had 15 or 20 players from Northern California show up. Of course, a large reason for the great showing can be attributed to the ongoing competition between Fremont's Mission San Jose Elementary School and Weibel Elementary School. Mission won in numbers attending the Nationals with 19 players attending to Weibel's 16.

Last year, Mission San Jose's Elementary School Team came away with the first ever Elementary School Championship title for a Team from Northern California. This inspired Weibel Elementary School to try and match their success this year. For nearly 20 years these two teams have dominated the State Championships in both the Elementary and Primary Division with Mission San Jose holding a slight edge. As I wrote in an earlier article for the CalChess site, after Weibel dominated the Fremont City Championships, I felt that this year's Weibel Team was one of the strongest ever. In April's State Championships Weibel and Mission San Jose tied for first in the Primary School Championships and although both are considered State Champions, Mission took home the first place title on tie-breaks. In the Elementary School division Weibel squeaked by with the Team Championships.

Back in the 1996, when both Mission San Jose and Weibel Elementary School players fed into Hopkins Junior High School, they became the first ever Northern California School to win that championship title. The top four individuals from a team count for points and two came from Weibel and two from Mission to lead Hopkins to their first place victory. At the Nationals there are many divisions yet only the open section winners can take the title champion. Other Northern California teams have done well, and even won sections in the Nationals, but cannot officially be referred to as National Champions. This statement does not diminish their national success. Hundreds of students and numerous schools send their best to the spring nationals. This year's National Elementary School competition had over 2000 players divided into nine divisions.

While the competition between Mission San Jose Elementary and Weibel Elementary Schools can at times be described as intense, they have always worked together at the Nationals to show Northern California at its best. The schools shared a team room in Atlanta and took great pride in the success of both teams' players. In the photographs I took of the Weibel Team (<http://www.calnorthjuniorchess.org/ChessNationals2010/>) you can view the both teams' players sharing fun moments together awaiting the seventh round results.

When the final results came in the team room rocked. Weibel had become the first ever Northern California team to win the Primary School (K-3) Championship. Albeit, they tied with Hunter College School who took home the trophy that said first, yet both teams will be listed as National Champions.



Girls anchored the Weibel Primary School team. I could find no other national championship team that had three girls as part of the four that scored. Even the back-up player was a girl. Third grade student Michael Wang (1710) led the team with 5.5 points and tied for ninth. He only lost to the individual who won the championship and he sustained one draw. Second Grade student Joanna Liu (1348), who went undefeated at the Girl's Nationals in mid-April and has been invited to represent the United States at the World Youth Championships in Greece in November, provided four points to the Weibel Team score of 17 points. Alisha Chawla (1213), in third grade, also provided 4 points.

Alisha placed seventh in the Girl's Nationals, playing up an age group, and has already represented the United States at the World Youth Chess Championships in Vietnam (2008) and Turkey (2009). Sadly, the Girls' Nationals took place on the same weekend as our State Championships. This meant they could not be present to have provided Weibel with a clear victory. Serafina Show (second grade) signed up a bit late for the Nationals, but after some outstanding results in a few events leading up to May, her parents decided she should join her friends. Her 3.5 points, especially her crucial win in round seven, not only meant a team victory, but she returned to Fremont with a 1046 rating, a first place trophy for her rating group and obtained a Weibel Chess Team Honor Roll cap. Our fourth girl, Desiree Ho (903) finished with three points, a very respectable showing at any Nationals. The girls were so excited they started doing cartwheels. Sometimes I forget how old I am and decided to join them. My toe still has not healed from my klutzy fall.

Weibel's team had never finished higher than fourth in a National Elementary School Championship before. This year due to the excellent play of fourth grade student Kevin Moy (1619), who played up, and former State Champion, Daniel Ho (1713), both obtaining 5 points and taking home individual trophies, Weibel won third. Justin Wang (1623) shined drawing a series of the top players and finishing with 4.5 points. Yet, without the last round win and 3.5 points of Nikhil Jaha (1428) we would have not gotten the new record. Nikhil obtained a first place trophy for his rating section.

Weibel had been knocking on the door of the first place team in the Elementary School Championship division throughout the tournament. Weibel took solace in the two teams that finished above them were Intermediate and Middle Schools that drew from a much larger area than one elementary school. Once again, I want to identify the strength of both Weibel and Mission San Jose Elementary schools which sit about two and a half miles from each other. Can you imagine the national success if they could combine into an intermediate or middle school?

Mission San Jose, although not obtaining a second title had a wonderful Nationals. They finished in the top ten in all four-championship division--something no other team in the country accomplished. Their best showing was in the K-1 section where they finished second against 50 teams. Three of their players took home trophies: John Chan (tied for 12<sup>th</sup>), Mihir Bhuptani (tied for 22<sup>nd</sup>) and Luke Zhao (tied for 22<sup>nd</sup>). A kindergartner, Soorya Kuppam, anchored their team. In the Primary School division, that Weibel won, Mission San Jose received a fifth place trophy in their tie for fourth place. This was out of 98 teams. Amit Sant (1429) won a trophy for tying for 24<sup>th</sup> place.

The Mission San Jose team showed it was a strong contender for next year's National Elementary School title by finishing third in the K-5 Championships. Wouldn't that be something, having not only a two-time winner in Northern California, but three years in a row having a National Championship team from our State. Armaan Kalyanpur (1687) took home a trophy for tying for seventh place with 5.5 points. Alvin Kong (1591) tied for 19<sup>th</sup> place. Finally, the Mission San Jose team tied for ninth in the Elementary School Championship bringing back to Fremont the tenth place trophy.

Fremont borders on the City of Newark. And, just a few miles away from the Fremont dual champions lives the world's youngest FIDE Master, Tanuj Vasudeva (1927). A couple of years ago he tied for the National K-1 Championship title with Roland Feng (1966) from the state of Washington. Both were now contending for their second title—the K-3 National Champion. We waited anxiously for the results, routing loudly for Tanuj—a hometown hero. Roland won the day and became the 2010 National Primary School Champion with Tanuj tying for second. No mean accomplishment. However, two Northern Californians did come home in triumph with the cupids flying behind blowing their horns. Allan Beilin, from Redwood City (the U.S. Chess Federation newsletter erroneously listed him as Fremont) was the clear winner in the K-5 Championship division being pushed by another North Californian, Art Zhao, who tied for second. Only one point behind Allan were Kesav Viswanadha, Jeffrey Tao, and Armaan Kalyanpur—all tied for 7<sup>th</sup> place. Alvin Kong and Cameroon Wheeler took home trophies tied for 18<sup>th</sup> place.

Daniel Liu (2032) proved his expert rating was one to contend with by becoming the other individual National Champions from Northern California—he lives in Palo Alto. Daniel tied for first with three other sixth grade competitors.

My Kudos would not be complete without mentioning a few other trophy winners: Leyton Ho tied for ninth in the K-3 Championships. Solomon Ge tied for third in the K-1 Championships. If I missed anyone, please accept my deepest apologies. It was not intentional.



I want to thank the following people for helping me bring together the material for this article: Michael Aigner who kept tabs on the activities in his blog (<http://fpawn.blogspot.com>). Carl Moy who seems to not only know every young chess player in Northern California, but keeps track of the top players nationwide and Ted Castro's newsletter. Ted, affectionately referred to as "Teddy bear" by the girls of the Weibel Championship National Team, came along with his own son to help coach the players. From what I understand, Ted is tutoring 50 young players and has a waiting list of 40. Thirteen of these attended the Nationals in Atlanta including a few from both Weibel and Mission San Jose Elementary Schools.

I conclude this short report with one final line due to my bias that was proven by the results of the Primary School Championship: Northern California Girls Rule!