

2011 Elementary Nationals: A K-1 Preview (Ben Rood a favorite)

May 6, 2011
by Kele Perkins

The main event of the 2011 Elementary National Championships begins today and was preceded by a simul by GM Maurice Ashley, which began at 10 AM EST. The following preview focuses on a section that is often overlooked in favor of the tournaments with older players. Look for an update tomorrow by Shaun and Matan.

In 2010, the K-1 Championship section at the Elementary National Championships had 14 players with supplement ratings of at least 1000. In this weekend's 2011 edition, the section boasts at least 26 such entrants. If there were a Most Improved Section trophy, this section could well be expected to win it. In part because its young players are improving at such a rapid pace, the K-1 section is surely one of the more exciting aspects of these national championships.



On paper, the ratings favorite is Ben Rood (left) of California. A student at the Chris Torres Chess and Music Academy, Rood has shown tremendous improvement in the last several weeks. His recent victories over 2nd grade national co-champion Josiah Paul Stearman and a win against an 'A' player show that Rood is in great form. Torres believes young Ben is "destined to become a national champion," and his play at the Northern California state championships gives some credence to his teacher's prediction. Another Torres student, Chenyi Zhao, had a recent ratings slip, but is still a force to be reckoned with. A third, Milind Maiti, is among the country's top kindergarteners.

While Rood maintains the top current rating at 1605, he is not the top seed. That privilege goes to hometown favorite Jason Metpally (rated 1464 for April) of the Dallas Chess Club. Metpally is currently the top-rated 6-year-old in the US. He did not attend the 2010 Grade Nationals in Orlando, but very likely would have been a serious challenger for the 1st grade title, as he is now for the K-1 crown. The same can be said of the San Diego Chess Club's Ajay Krishnan, who recently won the Southern California K-1 state title [crushing my son Joaquin along the way].

Top finishers at the Grade Nationals, K-1 section, Richie Takasumi, Joaquin Perkins and Daniel Levkov

Virginia's Tan Nguyen will be looking to repeat the good start he achieved at the Grade Nationals, and to improve upon his finish there. New York is well-represented by Harris Lencz, Daniel Levkov, and Hunter's Corwin Cheung near the top of the pairing sheets. The latter two placed well at Grade Nationals and will certainly be looking to take home one of the larger trophies. Levkov had a breakthrough event at the Philly Open, coming within inches of the 1500 mark. Cheung,

who has also surpassed 1400, dominated all but the last few moves of the 1st grade championship final, demonstrating he is a champion-caliber player. Lencz has recently broken into the 1300 range, making him a legitimate contender. [At the time of writing, Ben Katz' prodigy Rohan Suryawanshi, rated 1514, was not yet registered to play in the K-1 section.] Not to be outdone, Texas will answer with Diego Costa, Charlie Hu, and kindergartener Atreya Vaidya.

Others such as Ethan Tang, Richard Takasumi, Jason Zhang, Andrew Wang, Gia Peterson, and kindergartener Maggie Ni round out the darkhorses over 1100. However, a lower-rated player who has earned the right to be mentioned here is last year's K-1 champion, Praveer Sharan of Oregon, who returns to defend his title. Sharan's perfect 7-0 run through a field of more than 300 players was a harsh lesson to anyone believing that published ratings determine outcomes. With a supplement rating of 860 at the time (but 1300+ in the Northwest Scholastic Ratings System), he surprised many by pulling off a few upset victories on his way to the title under the guidance of his teacher, NM Radu Roua.

Will all these favorites survive their early-round ratings mismatches? What opening surprises, unexpected pairings, and upsets will change the course of the tournament? Will there be a fighting game on the top board in the final round, or will a quiet draw produce co-champions? [Check the tournament standings throughout the weekend to find out.](#) Best of luck to all, and may the best player win!

Kele Perkins is a teacher, Class B chess player, and former musician. His son Joaquin won the K section at the 2009 Grade Nationals and was the only player to repeat as champion in 2010. Kele Perkins' first CLO contribution was as lyricist to the famous Irina Krush Victory Rap. Find out more about his music on www.myspace.com/keleperkins