

# Northern California Chess Teams triumph at Nationals

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by Joe Lonsdale

Over 5,200 school children from all 50 states competed in National Scholastic Chess Championships in Nashville, Tennessee the weekend of April 6<sup>th</sup> to 8th. Mission San Jose Elementary (MSJE) and Gomes Elementary, both of Fremont, won the two major elementary school chess championships. Mission San Jose also took home two other top five championship division finishes (K-1 & K-3) and four MSJE graduates playing for Hopkins Junior High took home a top 5 K-8 trophy.

This report tells of the results of the Northern California teams at the 2013 Nationals in Nashville TN. Five Fremont teams finished in the top five in Championship sections and Kennedy Middle School of Cupertino finished second in K-9. The scoring players for Kennedy were Cameron Wheeler (2291) with 5.5 points, Pranav Srihari (1884) with 5 points, Arhant Katare with 4 points and Kingsley Wang with 3 points. Kennedy had a 2102 rated player (Udit Iyengar) that did not attend. If Udit played and scored as expected, Northern CA could possibly have taken home three championship trophies.

These "Super Nationals" include the Elementary School, the Junior High, and the High School National championships at the same location. They are held every four years. The majority of the participants (over 3,000) competed in the Elementary school sections. Four Championship team trophies are handed out every year in the Elementary School sections. One of these trophies (K-1) went to Dalton School in New York City and one (K-3) went to PS41 in New York City. The other two Elementary School Championship trophies went MSJE and Gomes, both of Fremont, California. This is the second straight year that two of the four elementary School Chess Championships were won by Fremont schools.

The trophies won by the Fremont Schools were the major elementary sections. MSJE (Mission San Jose Elementary) won the K-6 (Kindergarten to sixth grade) Championship. This is overall Elementary School Championship of the USA. Gomes Elementary won the K-5 Championship.

MSJE has been a major scholastic chess power house since the early 90s. MSJE won the K-1 National Championship last year and they won the K-6 championship in 2009. Since 2010 MSJE has had more top 5 national championship section finishes than any other elementary school. MSJE brought 28 children to these championships. This included 22 MSJE students and 6 Hopkins students. MSJE graduates go to Junior High School at Hopkins Jr. High.

MSJE expected to repeat as K-1 National Champions. Our team was stronger and deeper than the MSJE team that won K-1 last year. We had two returning veterans from our 2012 National Championship team. It may seem strange to consider a first grader a "veteran" but if they played in K-1 as a K student and return as a first grader, they are veterans. MSJE also had eight players in the K-1 section. This is very important in the younger sections as young players often start playing much better at big tournaments.

The MSJE K-1 team had a reasonably good tournament. They came within one point of scoring as well as the championship team scored last year. Four K-1 teams from New York City, scored higher than the MSJE team. Scholastic chess is very big in New York City. Top players can win scholarships to private schools even before they start elementary school. Still the MSJE team was happy with the fifth place finish as the top five teams receive plaques for the scoring players and a very large team trophy. The scoring players on the MSJE K-1 team were Stephen He and Aidan Chen with 5 points (out of a possible 7), and Arnav Lingannagari and Kevin Pan with 4.5 points. Vasu Rao, Nivedha Maniv, Allyson Wong, and Aarti Sant also competed for MSJE in K-1.



**Allyson Wong, Vasu Rao, Kevin Pan, Aarti Sant, Nivedha Maniv, Stephen He, Arnav Lingannagari, Aidan Chen**

The MSJE K-3 team and Hopkins K-8 team were expected to finish in the top five based on the ratings of the players. Both teams finished fifth and earned a large trophy and plaques. The scoring players in K-3 were Rishith Susarla with 5 points, and Anna Meiyappan, Kavya Sasikumar, and Jeffrey Liu with 4 points. Edwin Thomas and Amulya Harish also competed for MSJE in K-3. Rishith, Jeffrey, Anna, Edwin, and Amulya are all second graders and will compete for MSJE in K-3 again next year. We plan to make a run for a K-3 Championship in 2014!



**Jeffrey Liu, Rishith Susarla, Kavya, Amulya Harish, Anna Meiyappan, Anna Meiyappan**

The scoring players for Hopkins were Armaan Kalyanpur with 5 points and Shalin Shah, Alvin Kong, and Eric Zhu with 4 points. Howard Shan and Sayan Das also competed for Hopkins in K-8. Shalin, Alvin, and Eric are all seventh graders. They have been part of the MSJE chess program since they were K students. Each of them teach in the Friday afternoon program at MSJE. Armaan, Alvin, Shalin, and Eric are on a championship robotics team that is run by Shalins' father, Nimish Shah.

The MSJE K-6 team was the biggest question mark of the tournament. Our second best sixth grader could not make the trip. This left the team a little short of the talent. We also had four talented fourth graders that could not make the trip. Because of this MSJE did not enter a K-5 team. For the last four years MSJE has been the only school in the country that has been top 10 in both K-5 and K-6. Because we did not enter a K-5 team David Pan, our top 4<sup>th</sup> grader, played in K-6.

After three rounds (total seven rounds) the K-6 team was tied for second place. However, after the fifth round the team had fallen to 7<sup>th</sup> place. All of the coaches were hoping that K-6 could rise to fifth place or better so they would get a set of plaques. Not only did the K-6 team

have a great last two rounds, but their competition had poor rounds and MSJE K-6 moved from 7<sup>th</sup> place to a clear first place. In the last round the top MSJE players (Amit Sant, Christopher Pan, David Pan, and Anjan Das) were playing higher rated opponents. They scored three wins and a draw for a 3.5 point round and a clear first place finish. Aditya Krishnan, Sashank Rao, Connor Chen, and Rajveer Oberoi also competed for MSJE in K-6. The team won a large trophy which will be displayed at the school, each scoring player won a plaque and a \$500 college scholarship.

Over the last eight year more than 80% of the Northern CA Scholastic Chess Championships have been won by MSJE. Gomes has had some second and third place finishes, but has not won any major Northern CA Championships in the last eight years. This makes Gomes winning a major national championship very special.

The K-5 section usually consists of fourth and fifth graders. Grade 6 and above are not allowed to play in the section and grades three and below usually play in K-1 or K-3. Gomes had four strong scholastic chess players attend these championships. Joanna Liu, grade 5 was rated 1847 and Ganesh Murugap (also grade 5) was rated 1761. These were the 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> highest ratings in the K-5 section. Gomes did not have any other 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders that attended these championships. Gomes brought a strong third grader (Jason Shule rated 1497) and a strong second grader (William Zhang rated 1358) to the tournament and entered them into the K-5 section. This was necessary to effectively compete as the team score is the score of the top four players on the team.

This still left them at a major disadvantage because most teams consist of six or more players. Teams with more than four players have an advantage as it is common for a scholastic player to have an occasional bad tournament. All of the MSJE teams had six or more players. Despite the disadvantages of having only four players, including a second and a third grader, (playing mainly against fourth and fifth graders) the Gomes team outscored all of the other 50 teams in K-5 and won the title of K-5 National Champions. The team won a large trophy; each player received a plaque and won a \$500 scholarship to college.



**Front**  
Aditya Krishnan, David Pan, Rajveer Oberoi, Sashank Rao

**Back**  
Connor Chen, Amit Sant, Joe Lonsdale, Anjan Das, Christopher Pan

All of the players and the parents were very pleased with the results of the trip. The children learned to compete and learned to handle both wins and losses.