



May 2026



Northwest Chess

May 2026, Volume 80-05 Issue 940

ISSN Publication 0146-6941

USPS publication 422390

Published monthly by the *Northwest Chess* Board.
To see the games from this issue online click:

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POSTMASTER:

Send address changes to the Office of Record:

Northwest Chess c/o Orlov Chess Academy
4174 148th Ave NE, Building I, Suite M
Redmond, WA 98052-5164

Periodicals postage paid at Seattle, Washington
USPS periodicals postage permit number (0422-390)

NWC Staff

Editor: Jeffrey Roland, jeffreyroland9@gmail.com
Games Editor: Ralph Dubisch, chesscoaching@gmail.com
Publisher: Duane Polich, publisher@nwchess.com
Business Manager: businessmanager@nwchess.com

Board Representatives

Aniruddha Barua, Alex Machin, Duane Polich,
Ralph Dubisch, Jeffrey Roland, Josh Sinanan,
Wilson Gibbins, Eric Holcomb.

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governing bodies of the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.

Advertising & Copy Deadline

Ads and submissions must be received by the fifth of the
month for the items to appear in the next issue:

May 5 for the June issue;
June 5 for July.

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Business Manager

Northwest Chess c/o Orlov Chess Academy
4174 148th Ave NE, Building I, Suite M
Redmond, WA 98052-5164

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Front Cover

Stephen Willy 2026 Washington State Champion.
Photo credit: Ani Barua.

Back Cover

Siana Razmov in the Girls Room at the 2025 National K-12
Championships in Spokane, Washington.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.

Submissions

Submissions of games (PGN format is preferable for
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1514 S. Longmont Ave.
Boise, Idaho 83706-3732
or via e-mail to:
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News Flash!

Josh Sinanan

A hearty congratulations to Elina Khudyev, a third grader at Open Window School in Bellevue. She recently won fourth place in the Girls Under Ten division at the 2026 KCF All-Girls Nationals Championships in Chicago, Illinois, April 10-12, 2026, with five wins and one loss out of six games.

This year's All-Girls Nationals, the 21st edition, drew a record 601 participants.



Elina Khudyev (L) and David Heiser, the chief organizer of Chicago All-Girls Nationals. Photo courtesy of Renaissance Knights Chess Foundation.



by Josh Sinanan

The 2025 National K-12 Grade Championships took place at the Spokane Convention Center December 12-14, 2025 in Spokane, Washington. A total of 1330 scholastic chess players in grades K-12 from throughout the United States participated in the three-day, seven-round Swiss tournament. This marked the first time US Chess has hosted a national event on the west coast since the 2002 National Elementary Championship in Portland and the 2012 US Open in Vancouver, Washington. The Spokane Convention Center was selected by US Chess to host the event to provide more opportunities for west coast players and to rotate the event to the other side of the country for a change. The National K-12 Grade Championships, which usually takes place in Orlando in mid-December, is a popular pre-holiday tradition for many chess families and typically attracts

upwards of 2,500 players when hosted on the east coast. A total of 413 players, just over 30%, were from Washington state, with New York sending the second most with 253. Attendance from other west coast states was also strong, with California sending 168, Oregon 62, and Idaho 40. Total attendance was down from previous years for a variety of reasons, including: the venue was far for those traveling from the east coast and required at least one connection; economic hardship, including the high cost of travel and accommodation; concerns about the weather and mountain pass conditions, especially the unprecedented flooding caused by torrential downpours; many of the larger teams and programs from the west coast choosing to skip this event due to travel concerns.

The event was hosted by the US Chess Federation with support from the City of Spokane and the Washington

Chess Federation. An experienced team of tournament directors and staff including Director of Events Pete Karagianis (Illinois), Assistant Director of Events Erik Czerwin (Illinois), Chief TD Karen Pennock (Arizona), Floor Chief Jacob Mayer (Washington), Scholastic Council Representative Josh Sinanan (Washington), Backroom Chief Bill Buklis (Illinois), Chess Control Manager Michelle Martinez (Arizona), and Section Chiefs Mike Hoffpauir (Virginia), Martha Underwood (Arizona), Jiten Patel (Minnesota), Michael Schulte (Maryland), Tom Langland (California), and Jeff Wiewel (Illinois) organized the event and coordinate the weekend's busy slate of activities. The fantastic group of dedicated volunteers, floor judges, and tournament directors included Polly Wright, Chris Bruceri, Adam Porth, Charles Hatherill, Matthew Wiewel, Norm May, Mani Atikankhotchasee, Allen Messenger, Kevin Hirschowitz, David Hirschowitz, Sangeeta Dhinra, Chouchan Airapetian, Angela Agaian, Bala Gopalan, Kavita Pendyala, Rekha Vuyyuru, Lori Riley, Bill Riley, Larry Bell, Kenneth Sloan, Carl Haessler, Deb Shafer, Daniel Shafer, Craig Moore, Deon Goodwin, Eric Vigil, and many others. Hundreds of photographs and video footage were chronicled throughout the weekend by the official US Chess photographer Hiedi Bulkley and WCF photographer extraordinaire Meiling Cheng.

In addition to the main tournament, several fun and exciting side events enhanced the immersive chess experience and provided entertainment for those interested in other types of chess activities. The fun kicked off on Thursday with a Bughouse tournament, a Puzzle Solving Competition, and a Blitz Tournament. Special guest grandmasters Michael Rohde (New York) and Magesh Panchanathan (North Carolina) gave lectures, simuls, and played all-comers blitz throughout the weekend. WGM Zoey Tang from Oregon was the special guest in the Girls Club Room, where she gave a lecture, a simul, and a blindfold chess exhibition! Washington State Governor Bob Ferguson, a chess master and former Washington State Champion, sent a special welcome message that was played during the opening ceremony. The Parents and Friends tournament was well attended by many of the local chess parents, many of whom are decent

players in their own right! There were several sponsors that stepped up to support the event, including Microsoft, Silver Knights Chess Academy, and the City of Spokane.

Special congratulations to the 2025 National K-12 Grade Champions and other Pacific Northwest prize winners:

Kindergarten

First Place – Zayn Shanmuganathan (7/7!!)

Second Place – Vihaan Rahul, 5.5

Fifth Place – Louis Xu, 5.0

For Ratings (800-999): First Place – Ayaan Karthik, 4.0

For Ratings (400-599): Second Place – Liam Zeng, 3.5

For Ratings Under 400: Second Place – Sam Ferris, 4.0; Third Place – Austin Wang, 4.0

First Grade

=First/Second Place – Baoshuo Yao & Lavin Donadi (6.5/7! – Co-Champions)

=15th Place – Callie Yan Jiang & Deethya R. Sankar, 5.0

For Ratings (600-799): Third Place – Rishabh Chanda, 4.5

For Ratings (400-599): Second Place – Leo Li, 4.0

Second Grade

=First – Fifth Place – Mehmet Yilanli, Dario Neshvadian, Matthew Wang, Aiden Huang & Dalton Gorczyca (6/7! – Co-Champions)

Sixth Place – Felix Han, 5.5

Tenth Place – Aryan Pande, 5.0

Eleventh Place – Easton Ren, 5.0

Twelfth Place – Skyler Qin, 5.0

Thirteenth Place – Ryan Lai, 5.0

Fourteenth Place – Samik Kulkarni, 5.0

For Ratings (1000-1199): Second Place – Vincent Gu, 4.5

For Ratings (600-799): First Place – Nolan Yin, 4.5; Second Place – Serena Guo, 4.0; Third Place – Avyukt Goyal, 4.0

For Ratings Under 600: First Place – Maxwell Hu, 4.5; Third Place – Ethan Hu, 3.0



Anna Wzywany and Robin Ramson welcome guests into the Girls Club Room in the Spokane Convention Center. Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.

Third Grade

=First – Fourth Place – Brian Ye, Taylor Liu, Max Mulholland & Jordan Kim (6/7! – Co-Champions)

11th Place – Loida Guo, 5.5

16th Place – Mokshith Kumar Mallapu, 5.0

17th Place – George Lucas Yeh, 5.0

21st Place – Suhaan Kesavan, 5.0

22nd Place – Kyle Jiang, 5.0

24th Place – Patrick Zhang, 5.0

For Ratings (1000-1199): First Place – Elina Khudiyev, 4.5; Second Place – Jeremy Ge, 4.5; Third Place – Sofia Byelashova, 4.5

For Ratings (800-999): First Place – Eric Yu, 4.5

For Ratings (600-799): Second Place – Ryan Lingjun Li, 3.5

For Ratings Under 600: Second Place – Anish Shrivastava, 3.5; Third Place – Leo Gu, 3.0



(L) Guest Grandmaster Michael Rohde takes on one of the House of Staunton bookstore staff members in all-comers blitz. Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.

Fourth Grade

=First – Fourth Place – Alexander Joseph, Samanyu Alluri, Aayansh Samanta & Chase Wang (6/7! – Co-Champions)

11th Place – Chen Yuan, 5.5

13th Place – Shawn Li, 5.5

20th Place – Anyi Li, 5.0

21st Place – Prahlada Saripalli, 5.0

For Ratings (1100-1399): Third Place – Kshitij Narkhede, 4.5

For Ratings (800-1099): First Place – Ved Dixit, 4.0; Second Place – Arthur Deng, 4.0

For Ratings (600-799): First Place – Levi Madsen, 4.0; Third Place – Pranav Bharadwaj, 3.5

For Ratings Under 600: First Place – Joshua Margo, 4.0; Second Place – Sanjana Siddhartha, 3.0; Third Place – Vihaan Sabharwal, 3.0

Fifth Grade

=First – Fourth Place – Aakash Jani, Vivaan Pavuluri, Srihas Sai Sarvesh Maddipati & Jack Boyer-Olson (6/7! – Co-Champions)

22nd Place – Andy Chen, 5.0

23rd Place – Ekam Sardar, 4.5

29th Place – Riaan Babbar, 4.5

=30th Place – Aiden Zhu & Oliver He, 4.5

For Ratings (1100-1399): First Place – Jake Bravenboer, 4.0

For Ratings (800-1099): First Place – Noble Schasteen, 4.0; Second Place – Gabriel Pleasants, 4.0

For Ratings (600-799): First Place – Pranav Swagath, 3.0; Second Place – Saahan Chadha, 3.0

For Ratings Under 600: First Place – George Buckham, 3.0; Second Place – Brandon Yin, 2.5; Third Place – Eugene McCarthy, 2.0

Sixth Grade

First Place – Liam Liu (6.5/7!!)

Third Place – CM Rafael Palathingal, 6.0

Sixth Place – Neevan Reddy Saddi, 5.5

Tenth Place – Lucas Maokhampio, 5.0

11th Place – Ziqian Gao, 5.0

17th Place – Vidur Ganesan, 5.0

24th Place – Akim Pikh, 4.5

=25th Place – Sirui Jimmy Yang & Karsh Havaladar, 4.5

For Ratings (1400-1699): First Place – Sriram Badri, 4.0

For Ratings (1100-1399): First Place – Guru Harshith Reddy Avula, 4.0; Second Place – Jackson Rish-Brown, 4.0

For Ratings (800-1099): First Place – Yaseen Helmy, 4.0; Second Place – Andres Flores Uriegas, 4.0

For Ratings Under 800: First Place – Vidur Raghunathan, 4.0; Second Place – Sreeram Murari Kakarlapudi, 3.5; Third Place – Hridik Sarkar, 3.0.

Seventh Grade

=First – Tenth Place – Mason Jin Li, NM Vidip Kumar Kona, Sivavishnu Srinivasan, NM Ethan Guo, NM Elliott Goodrich, Phineas Hugo Weingarten, Anson Leong, Miransh Purven Vyas, Glenn Zhang & Tarun Sankar (5.5/7! – Co-Champions)

13th Place – Odbayar Yondon, 5.0

=20th Place – Aarav Bharathy Mohan, Kate Wong, Sarang Athreya Sankrithi & Arnab Gadde, 4.5

Section	Team Champions	Score
K	Oak Hall Lower School, Gainesville, FL	13
1st	Oak Hall Lower School, Gainesville, FL	14
2nd	Somerset Elementary School, Bellevue, WA	13
3rd	PS 198 Isador E Ida Straus, New York, NY	14
4th	Dalton School, New York, NY	14
5th	Success Academy Midtown West, New York, NY	15
6th	JHS 167 Robert F Wagner, New York, NY	15
7th	Dalton School, New York, NY	16
8th	Success Academy Midtown West, New York, NY	14.5
9th	Millburn Sr High School, Millburn, NJ	15
10th	Success Academy High School Manhattan, New York, NY	13
11th	The Frazer School, Gainesville, FL	15
12th	Stuyvesant High School, New York, NY	15

For Ratings (1400-1699): First Place – Harry Wu, 4.0; Second Place – Stanley Deng, 4.0

For Ratings (1100-1399): First Place – Sai Navaneeth Satish Kumar, 4.0, Second Place – Kevin Zhang, 4.0

For Ratings (800-1099): First Place – Oliver Reimer, 4.0, Third Place – Ryan Bell, 3.5

For Ratings Under 800: First Place – Liam Weiss-Hurd, 3.0; Second Place – Nikhil Leon, 3.0; Third Place – Damien Davies, 3.0

Eighth Grade

First Place – Connor Wang (6.5/7!!)

Second Place – Varun Iyengar, 6.0

Eighth Place – NM Vihaan Jammalamadaka, 5.0

Tenth Place – Nikhil Ramkumar, 5.0

13th Place – Selina Cheng, 5.0

16th Place – Finnegan Flavin, 5.0

19th Place – Atharv Rastogi, 4.5

=20th Place – Aksh Singhal & Surya Barrenkala, 4.5

For Ratings (1100-1399): First Place – Tattva Chevuri, 4.0; Second Place – Sanjay Urali, 4.0; Third Place – Olivia Maokhampio, 4.0

For Ratings (800-1099): First Place – Viet Nguyen, 3.0; Third Place – Edwin Huang, 3.0

For Ratings Under 800: Second Place – Lukas Snider, 2.5; Third Place – Pranav Balaji, 2.5

Ninth Grade

=First/Second Place – FM Aditeya Das & FM Nitesh Cherukuri (6.0/7! – Co-Champions)

Fourth Place – Hayul Lim, 5.5

Seventh Place – Karthik Bimod, 5.0

13th Place – Darsh Verma, 4.5

14th Place – Keshav Beegala, 4.5

For Ratings (1300-1599): First Place – Zikrain Salal, 4.0

For Ratings (1000-1299): Third Place – Griffin Rhys Baldwin, 3.5

For Ratings Under 1000: Third Place – Junyi Li, 2.0

Tenth Grade

First Place – NM Sebastian Suarez (6.5/7!!)

Second Place – NM Nikash Vemparala, 6.0

Sixth Place – NM Austin Tang, 5.0

Seventh Place – Aaqil Ahmed Alpuri, 5.0

=Tenth Place – Gabriel Razmov, Linus Quinn Wannamaker, Evan Cen, Eshan Reddy & Saahil Gupta, 4.5

For Ratings (1300-1599): First Place – Misha Von Dassow, 4.0

For Ratings (1000-1299): Third Place – Tayshu Konde, 4.0

For Ratings Under 1000: Second Place – Samuel Tobias Van Wormer, 3.0

Eleventh Grade

First Place – IM Erick Zhao (6.5/7!!)

Second Place – NM Ryan Min, 6.0

=Tenth Place – NM Austin Liu, 5.0



*The stage is set with a generous number of trophies and medallions.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.*



*Female participants in the K-1 section are called up to the stage during the opening announcements by section Chief Mike Hoffpauir and Women's Committee Co-Chair Maureen Grimaud while Angela Agaian and Chouchan Airapetian show off the Girls Club Room poster.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.*

For Ratings (1300-1599): First Place –
Luke Hanniu Yu, 4.0

For Ratings (1000-1299): First Place –
Joshua Van Gorkom, 3.5

For Ratings Under 1000: First Place
– Kaamil Siddiqui, 3.5; Second Place –
Elizabeth Severynko, 3.5

Twelfth Grade

=First/Second Place – FM William
Safranek & NM Jed Sloan (6.0/7! – Co-
Champions)

Third Place – NM Yu-Cheng Liang, 5.5
=Tenth Place – Aadi Hetamsaria, 4.5

For Ratings (1600-1899): Third Place –
Lily Deng, 4.0

For Ratings (1000-1299): First Place –
Troy Chabot, 3.5

For Ratings Under 1000: Third Place –
Richard Bewick, 3.0

Observations and Comments

Below are a few observations and comments that yours truly, as the Scholastic Council Representative, noted about the event in alphabetical order:

Airport: Spokane International Airport was a convenient 15-minute Uber ride to the Spokane Convention Center. With few direct flights to Spokane, with one-two connections were required for most attendees traveling from out of state. The airport was quite busy on Monday with everyone flying out at the same time.

Badging: This event marked the first time badging was required for all players and “accompanying persons” across all

sections. Many badges were left on the floor in the playing hall or on the boards, with some kids re-entering the room to pick them up. Overall, the badging procedure worked well and was greatly appreciated by parents and coaches to ensure the safety of the kids.

Bathrooms: There were players-only bathrooms inside of the playing hall for the kids to use. The convention center had plenty of bathrooms and handled the volume of attendees just fine.

Blitz Tournament: The Blitz tournament was held in Exhibit Hall A on Thursday at 5:00 PM and attracted 92 players in K-12 and 155 in K-6. The winners of the K-12 Blitz were FM Stepen Willy and FM Vaseegaran Nandhakumar, each with 10/12. Seven players shared First-Seventh Place in the K-6 Blitz Championship, each with ten points from

12 games: Alexander Joseph, Aayansh Samanta, Mehmet Yilanli, Neevan R. Saddi, Evan Jin, Rafael Palathingal, and Grayson Xiang. A computer error delayed the start of round two for the K-12 section, which created frustration amongst players and parents.

Bughouse: The bughouse tournament, held in Exhibit Hall A on Thursday at 11:00 AM, attracted 42 teams—a strong showing. It was run by Martha Underwood and Sangeeta Dhingra and won by the team of Shafer—Nandhakumar with a perfect 12.0/12 points! The field was strong, including ten teams with at least one CM-level player. The most controversial game of the entire event took place in the bughouse tournament and involved a messy time scramble. The result was appealed and escalated all the way to Karen, but it did not affect the standings of any of the top

teams.

Check-out Procedure: There were multiple kiosks set up and the different exits of the playing hall where kids typed in their name to “check out” after their games were complete. Parents appreciated being pinged when their kids had finished their games and didn’t have to crowd around the entrances of the playing room waiting for their kids to finish. Overall, the check-out procedure went well and was managed fine by a few blue-vest parent volunteers.

Chess Control: Chess control, led by the amazing Michelle Martinez, had an all-star staff and had its main table in a prime location near the entrance to the playing halls. Chess control also took on the responsibility of printing and distributing the badges, as well as verifying that attendees had their badges

before entering the “playing area”, which encompassed the skittles and playing rooms, as well as the convention center foyer. Chess control did an excellent job with the badging and one of the chess control personnel told me that he printed over 700 badges on Friday! The addition of badge-printing and checkpoints made for long and demanding days for the chess controls staff. Their efforts are greatly appreciated!

Food Options: The food at options at this venue was somewhat poor. There were inadequate healthy food options available in the convention center, with only chicken wings, fries, and nacho cheese pretzels available as substance in the convention center. The fast food offered was also quite expensive, marked up by \$5-10 compared to what you could find at a nearby restaurant. The convention center staff were strictly enforcing the no-



*Guest GM Magesh Panchanathan takes on his young challengers during an early morning Simul in the skittles room.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.*

outside food policy, much to the dismay of many parents and coaches trying to provide sustenance for their kids. Some parents reported being searched by convention center staff as they entered the venue, and some had to eat outside in the cold due to the strict enforcement. Particularly alarming is that some parents (especially women and people of color) reported being profiled by the convention center staff, most of whom were white. There was no central market or food court available near the convention center, which made getting food challenging at peak times and created long lines at the nearby restaurants, who were not equipped to handle the surge in volume. It's important to have healthier (and affordable) food available for purchase at the venue.

Guest Grandmasters: All-comers Blitz, Simul, Lectures, etc. The special guest GMs were GM Michael Rohde (New York, lecture + all-comers blitz) and GM Magesh Panchanathan (North

Carolina, simul + lecture). WGM Zoey Tang was the special guest in the Girls Club Room, where she gave a lecture, a simul, and even a blindfold exhibition. She did an amazing job and connected well with the girls! NM Adam Weissbarth gave a talk on Sunday morning titled "From Munchkin to Master: How to help your child take the next step," which was very well attended. The All-Comers blitz was quite popular as usual, with many kids lining up to play against the Grandmasters as well as FunMaster Mike on Friday. GM Michael Rohde presented his games against PNW legend GM Yasser Seirawan from the 1980s and 90's. All the lectures were well attended and engaging.

Puzzle Solving Championship: The National Puzzle-Solving Championship was run by Mike Klein and the ChessKid staff on Thursday at 3:00 PM in room 300A near the Girls Club room. 136 kids participated, using iPads, laptops, and smartphones to do the puzzles. The

winner was Second Grader Mehmet Yilanli from Ohio, rated 1959!

Sponsors: Generous sponsorship was provided by Microsoft, Silver Knights Chess Academy, and the City of Spokane. This was the first time in recent memory that there have been sponsors for a National Scholastic event! US Chess was referred to a connection at Microsoft by Washington State Governor Bob Ferguson. The Silver Knights Academy run by the Weissbarth brothers also sponsored the event. Hopefully this trend can continue in the future!

Venue: The Spokane Convention Center was an excellent venue for this tournament and was a quick 15-minute Uber ride away from the airport. There was a nice view of the Spokane River from the convention center and natural light in the Exhibit Hall A, a nice feature of this venue! Besides the food situation and strict no-outside food policy, the venue was great and very spacious. It could have easily accommodated a few



*The parents and friends tournament, run by NTD Chris Kim, was well attended.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.*



*Coach Tim Moroney analyzes a game with one of his students.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.*

hundred more players. Many of the team rooms were quite a far walk from the playing hall, and there was plenty of space for parents to set up in the hallways and many available areas with access to power outlets to set up and do work.

Main tournament

Tournament Flow: The tournament ran on schedule and experienced no significant delays or hiccups. One of the kids played a fantastic rendition of the National Anthem on their violin at the opening ceremony, which was well attended. Mike Hoffpauir and his team in the K-1 room ran very smooth tournament and parents were quite happy. The lighting in both playing halls was excellent, especially in the main playing hall, which had a big window overlooking the Spokane River and plenty of natural light.

The convention center staff were very responsive in refilling the water stations, replenishing the cups, and cleaning up messes throughout the event.

Merchandise Vendors: The T-shirt and apparel vendor was set up in the Skittles Room (Exhibit Hall C) next to the bookstore in the front of the room in a convenient and visible location. They offered standard designs, sizes, and colors for their merch, which seemed reasonably priced for a national event. The logo design for this event was especially good and integrated key themes and colors from the Pacific Northwest. The bookstore was located on the right side of the skittles room and offered its usual selection of chess books, merch, and tournament memorabilia. Inventory was more limited than in other National events since all the items had

to be shipped from their headquarters in Huntsville, Alabama. They sold out of tournament-themed boards quickly since they only brought around 50. The 20% off end-of-tournament sale seemed to be their busiest time, with many folks postponing their purchases until the end of the event when everything was on sale.

Pairings/Standings: Pairings and standings were posted online, on the US Chess App, and in limited areas around the tournament venue, including the foyer area near chess control and in the skittles room. There was very little congestion around the physical standings and pairings posted on the trifolds, with most players and parents choosing to view the pairings online or via the new app. There was free Wi-Fi throughout the convention center, which sufficed for checking pairings, sending texts, and email.

Scholastic Meeting: The Scholastic Meeting was led by Scholastic Committee Representative Josh Sinanan on Saturday December 13 1:45-2:45 PM with about 11 people in attendance, including: Scholastic Committee Chair Danny Rohde, Scholastic Committee member Charles Hatherill, Director of Events Pete Karagianis, and Chief TD Karen Pennock. Attendance was low, which might be a good sign that things are going well. We could also consider renaming the “Scholastic Meeting” to “Scholastic Feedback Meeting” to make the purpose of the meeting clearer. The room for the meeting wasn’t listed on the app, which

may have led to some not attending. Karen gave a brief report before heading back to the playing hall. Pete gave a report about the badging, app, and other tech upgrades. There was a good discussion about the venue and some issues associated with the convention center, especially the food situation. Some items that were discussed included:

Some of the tables were uneven in the playing hall.

Nice view of the water from the playing room, and good acoustics.

Improved signage for bathrooms + exits in the playing hall.

The parents and coaches present in the playing hall during the blitz tournament need to be monitored more carefully and some were taking videos of the blitz games.

Food was a big issue – not enough options that were healthy and affordable.

There was a recommendation to add a post-event “Thank You” note as a push notification to teams that attended.

The voucher system needs to be revisited.

At-Risk-Youth Sponsorship Program info should be added to the app. Tournament

Suggestion to keep Chess Control Open later during the last round.

Setup & Teardown: Several of the TDs, parent volunteers, and the scholastic rep set up the playing rooms on Thursday while the bughouse tournament was taking place. There were some issues with the table and chair setup in the main playing hall (Exhibit Hall A). The chairs were set up incorrectly with 11 on each row instead of 12, which meant that Karen and Jacob had to rework the room layout and overflow to the back of the room. The microphone and speakers were not set up in time for the Thursday side events, which meant that the TDs had to yell during their opening announcements. This was fixed for Friday but should have been caught earlier. The speaker broadcasting the welcome message from Washington State Governor Bob Ferguson was barely audible and couldn’t be heard by most of the players or parents during the opening ceremony. The welcome message was later posted on the app and US Chess social media pages. There was a significant amount of plastic recycling generated by all the new boards, pieces, and awards used for the event. This was gathered by Josh and taken back to Seattle for plastic recycling via Ridwell. The US Chess office should consider looking into plastic recycling options for future events.

Skittles Room: The skittles room was conveniently located in Exhibit Hall C on the second floor of the convention center next to the main chess control table. The skittles room was quite spacious and had plenty of room to spread out, making it a popular hang-out spot for players between games. The escalators made traveling between the skittles room and team rooms on the first floor seamless. Most tables in the skittles room



*Floor chief and well-known organizer Jacob Mayer.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.*



(L) Allen Messenger and Josh Sinanan.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.

were occupied, especially by the smaller teams who opted for a table or two in the skittles room instead of renting a team room. Also located in the skittles were the T-shirt vendor, booths for ChessKid + Silver Knights Academy, bookstore, and grandmaster activities (all-comers blitz and simuls). I visited several of the coaches and parents in the skittles room, and everyone seemed pleased with how the event was run.

Thursday Night TD Meeting: The event was slightly short-staffed, with ~20 floor TDs and six section chiefs for 1,330 kids. The tournament lost one TD due to illness (flu) and another cancelled a week before the event, but the staff adapted well and filled in the gaps as needed. Karen emphasized the importance of teamwork and mentorship from the section chiefs, especially with so many new TDs working

the event. As is customary, it was decided that a float-up approach would be used, with TDs from the lower grades filtering up to the higher sections as games in the lower sections finished.

Tournament Directors/Staffing:

Chief TD: Karen Pennock (Arizona)

Floor Chief: Jacob Mayer (Washington)

Backroom Chief: Bill Buklis (Illinois)

Section Chiefs: Mike Hoffpauir (Virginia), Martha Underwood (Arizona), Jiten Patel (Minnesota), Michael Schulte (Maryland), Tom Langland (California), Jeff Wiewel (Illinois).

Chess Control: Michelle Martinez (Arizona)

An excellent team of experienced

section chiefs and leaders ran this event very smoothly. The team worked together amazingly well, and there was a feeling of genuine friendship and camaraderie amongst the staff and tournament directors on and off the floor. It was inspiring to see so many local TDs from the Pacific Northwest coming out and supporting this event! Mike Hoffpauir mentioned that the Washington TDs in his section required only minor mentoring and were quite experienced running scholastic events already, since they are quite active in scholastics on the local level. Karen emphasized the importance of mentorship and passing down knowledge and experience on the part of the section chiefs to the newer TDs. The tournament had some blue vest volunteers helping to manage the badging and check-out procedure as the players left the playing hall.

Team Rooms: There were no tables or chairs in some of the team rooms, which should have been noticed ahead of time. It would be a nice touch in the future to have all the badges ready to go in each team room for coaches, parents, and players, in addition to a few extra badges for additional folks as part of the team room package.

There were plenty of team rooms available for any team that requested one. Many of the team rooms that Josh Sinanan and Danny Rohde visited were mostly empty and had a lot of open space, with only a few large teams from New York, Florida, and Washington attending. The Girls Club Room was in room 300 B just down the escalator from the main playing area and had a spacious room with many of the girls attending between rounds.

Some of the team rooms had closets which could be closed over night to store chess equipment without it being visible, much to the delight of the coaches.

There were no water stations in the team rooms, and several teams mentioned that they wouldn't mind paying extra for water stations if they were offered. The biggest complaint from the teams attending was the strict enforcement of the "no outside food" policy.

Some coaches mentioned that they felt physically ill from consuming the fast food that was offered at the convention center and would not have brought their teams to this event had they known about the food situation.

Congratulations to all players, chess families, tournament directors, and staff who contributed to the 2025 K-12 Grade Nationals. We look forward to the continued growth and success of this event and hope to see more national events hosted out west in the years to come!



*Three members of the Razmov family: (L-R) Gabriel, Siana, and their father Valentin.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.*



Eastside Open



May 9-10, 2026
Hotel 116 Bellevue
625 116th Ave NE
Bellevue, WA 98004

Format: A 5-round Swiss in three sections: **Bellevue Open**, **Kirkland U1700**, and **Redmond U1200**.

Entry fee: \$110 by 5/2, \$140 after. \$60 play-up fee if rated 1500-1699 or 1000-1199 in both NWSRS and USCF and playing up in Bellevue Open or Kirkland U1700, respectively. Players rated 2200+ USCF receive a \$50 discount. Maximum of 140 players, please register early to reserve your spot!

Schedule: Arrival: 9-9:45am. Rounds: Sat @ 10am, 2:30pm, 7pm. Sun @ 10am, 3pm. Closing Ceremony + Blitz Tournament: ~ 7pm or asap. Games that go long may request a late start for the next round.

Time Control: G/75; +30. Late default: 60 minutes.

Rating: Triple rated in NWSRS, USCF, and FIDE. Higher of May 2026 USCF or current NWSRS rating used to determine section, pairings, and prizes. Higher of USCF or foreign rating used at TD discretion.

Memberships: Current US Chess and WCF membership/Northwest Chess subscription required. Memberships must be paid at time of registration.

Prize Fund: \$5,500 based on 100 paid entries.

Bellevue Open: 1st-4th: \$500-\$400-\$300-\$250. 1st-2nd U2100: \$175-\$150, 1st-2nd U1900: \$175-\$150.

Kirkland U1700: 1st-4th: \$400-\$300-\$200-\$150, 1st-2nd U1600: \$125-\$100, 1st-2nd U1400: \$125-\$100.

Redmond U1200: 1st-4th: \$300-\$250-\$200-\$150, 1st-2nd U1000: \$100-\$75, 1st-2nd U800: \$100-\$75.

Special Prizes (per section): Clyde Hill Biggest Upset Win: \$20/rd., Medina Best Female Player (by TPR): \$50, Hunts Point Best Senior Player (by TPR): \$50, Yarrow Point Best Dressed: \$20/day.

Byes: Up to 2 half-point byes available if requested before the end of round 2.

Registration: Online at nwchess.com/OnlineRegistration. Pay by SettleKing (Washington Chess Federation), Zelle (wa-chess), or mail a check to WCF. Registration and payment **deadline: Fri. 5/8 @ 5pm**. No registrations accepted or refunds offered after the deadline.

Eastside Open Blitz Tournament: Sunday 7-9:30pm (after rd. 5 of main tournament). **Entry Fee:** \$30.

Format: A 9-Round Single Swiss in one section, 2 half-point byes available. Dual USCF Blitz + FIDE Blitz rated.

TC: G/3; +2. **On-site registration:** 6:00-6:45pm. Rds. Sun @ 7pm, 7:15, 7:30, 7:45, 8, 8:15, 8:30, 8:45, 9pm.

Closing Ceremony ~ 9:15pm or asap. Current US Chess membership required. Higher of May 2026 USCF Blitz or Regular rating used to determine pairings and prizes.

Prize Fund: \$750 (based on 50 paid entries)

1st – 3rd: \$170-140-100, 1st U2000/U1700/U1400/U1100/Unrated: \$50. Biggest upset win: \$10/rd.

Questions – Josh Sinanan, WCF President, 206-769-3757, washingtonchessfederation@gmail.com

Mother's Day Scholastic

CHESS TOURNAMENT

MOTHER'S DAY SUNDAY, MAY 10, 2026

HOTEL 116 BELLEVUE

625 116TH AVE NE, BELLEVUE, WA 98004



Format

A 5-round, G/25; +5
Swiss tournament in four
sections:

K-3 U800

K-3 Open

4-12 U900

4-12 Open

Schedule

Rd. 1 – 10am

Rd. 2 – 11:15am

Rd. 3 – 12:30pm

Rd. 4 – 1:45pm

Rd. 5 – 3pm

Awards ~ 4:30pm

Eligibility

Open to all students in
grades K-12 as of the
2025-26 school year.
Out-of-state players
welcome!

Entry Fee

\$55 by 5/3, \$65 after.
Room for 60 players.

Awards

Section Prizes: Amazon e-gift
cards awarded in each
section:

1st – 4th: \$75-65-55-45.

Special Prizes (per section):
Medals for first-time players,
best female player, best
dressed, and biggest upset win.

Rating

Dual NWSRS and USCF rated,
with **US Chess membership
required in all sections.**

Establish or update your
national rating! Higher of
current NWSRS or May 2026
USCF rating will be used to
determine section and
pairings.

Clocks + Notation

Chess clocks set to G/25; +5 will be
used from the beginning in all games.
Chess notation required in all sections
except for K-3 U800. All equipment is
provided courtesy of WCF.

Registration

Register online at
[NWchess.com/OnlineRegistration/](https://nwchess.com/OnlineRegistration/)
Pay by SettleKing (Washington Chess
Federation), Zelle (wa-chess), or write a
check made out to: WCF.

**100% pre-registered, no on-site entries
or payments. Entry + payment
deadline Sat May 9 @ 5:00pm.** No
registrations accepted or refunds
offered after the deadline.

Questions?

Contact Josh Sinanan, WCF President,
WashingtonChessFederation@gmail.com,
206-769-3757

A Conversation with FM Stephen Willy

Ken Lee

At 16 years of age, FM Stephen Willy has packed a lot of chess and competition in his life. I sat down with Stephen recently to discuss how a blend of home schooling, a competitive streak and a particular mindset has helped him thrive in the world of chess and more.

Ken: When did you first start playing chess?

Stephen: I first started playing chess in 2017 when I was seven years old.

Ken: Who first taught you?

Stephen: My dad taught me the basic rules and then I started competing, on a whim, at the Chess4life quads.

Ken: How did you do in that first tournament?

Stephen: Honestly, I didn't know what I was doing, and I didn't perform very well. I stopped playing for one and a half years because it didn't appeal to me at that time.

Ken: Interesting. When did you play in your next tournament?

Stephen: I don't think I played again until I was almost nine. I had started homeschooling and it allowed me some

opportunity to renew interest in chess. I played in another quad and scored 1½ points.

Thinking about it, I think that modest score was just enough to keep me motivated.

Ken: How did you progress from that point on?

Stephen: I started doing some individual online chess studies. I was always competitive, and chess appealed to me for that reason. I participated in some other memory competitions like spelling bee and Bible bee. While they were fun, they did not offer me opportunity to compete consistently.

Ken: How often did you play back then?

Stephen: I would play the Chess4Life Friday quads as often as possible but then COVID hit. I started playing more online games for fun and online tournaments.

Ken: What were those years like for you?

Stephen: Since I was already in homeschool, I had a unique opportunity to use my time creatively.

I played WCF tournaments and started participating in some online out-of-state tournaments as well.

Ken: How did you progress during that time?

Stephen: I was steadily progressing in my online chess rating. One day in 2021 I played GM Varuzhan Akobian in blitz during his livestream session of STL chess club, and I beat him. That's when my parents sought coaching for me.

Ken: Did it feel logical to have an online chess coach during COVID?

Stephen: Yes. It didn't matter where they were from. I just wanted to work with someone who could help me with

my game.

Ken: Who was your first coach?

Stephen: I worked with GM Aleksandr Lenderman from New York for a bit.

Ken: What kind of advice did he give you during that time?

Stephen: He made me aware that I need to slow down considering that I played too many online blitz games. He was the one who encouraged me to compete in my first out of state chess tournament.

Ken: Where was that?

Stephen: My first out of state tournament was the National Open in Las Vegas in the summer of 2021. I signed up for Under 1500 section. I did very well in that tournament and had a huge boost to my ELO.

Stephen: Eventually, GM Lenderman introduced me to GM Giorgi Kacheishvili. I worked with him for three years.

Ken: What specific knowledge or psychological tips did he share with you that helped your game?

Stephen: With GM Kacheishvili it really was the first time that I understood what it meant to study chess with intention.

Ken: What do you specifically mean by that?

Stephen: When I was younger, I would play a lot of blitz and kind of have an open-ended way of studying.

But GM Kacheishvili would pick specific themes, and we would discuss them from both the white and black perspectives.

He would set up positions based upon specific things I needed to work on.



Then when we thought I was through understanding that individual theme, he would introduce me to more themes.

Over time, the effect was that I could recognize patterns and understand the game from both positions with precision.

Ken: How often did you meet?

Stephen: We would meet online maybe once or twice a week. But the thing about chess is that it has a way of seeping into your consciousness so much so that you are studying it even when you are relaxing.

Ken: What do you mean by that?

Stephen: When someone gives me a particular chess problem to think about, I often work on those problems when I'm walking around my house.

I can visualize the position in my head. I think a lot of my gains in chess come because I have the time, flexibility, and interest to think about chess a lot.

Ken: How do you balance chess and academics?

Stephen: To be honest, it used to be 60% chess and 40% academics. Now that I'm getting older, I think it's reversed to 60% academics and 40% chess.

Ken: How have you overcome setbacks in your chess career?

Stephen: There have been a few times when I've had a very rough tournament or a very dry spell, and I think I'm just going to quit.

Ken: What did you do about it?

Stephen: I learned not to ignore my bad experiences but rather reframe them in a way that is useful to me.

Ken: Can you amplify on that please?

Stephen: Instead of trying to forget my past poor performances, I reflect on them and use them to push me forward.

I say to myself: "Hey, I'm still standing. I made it past that experience, and I can go on."

Ken: That's amazing. Usually, the phrase, "I'm still standing" is supposed to be a message of survival for older folks. Somehow you have figured out how to utilize this mantra, at a very young age, to keep you going and competing in very high stakes situations.

Stephen: Yes, I know that chess tournaments can mean big opportunities

for rating boosts. Or they could mean winning prize money. It's a lot of pressure.

Ken: Do you think chess has helped you become a stronger individual?

Stephen: I think chess helps me train my mind to be resilient. Of course, it's stressful sometimes. But I remind myself that I chose to be in these situations and that being purposeful is helpful for my game and my life as well.

Ken: Do you see chess as a viable career?

Stephen: I can see myself coaching but I really don't know if chess is going to be my primary career. I do see it being a part of my life for a long time.

Ken: How have international chess tournaments changed you or your game?

Stephen: International tournaments allow me to play against players with different style than in the US. I also enjoy engaging with players coming to those places. One of my favorite memories from a recent international trip was the 2025 Zupanja Open blitz tournament in Croatia.

Ken: Who is your current chess coach?

Stephen: I'm currently working with GM Aleksander Delchev from Bulgaria. I knew Coach Delchev when he organized hybrid tournaments during COVID time. He had made a few positive comments about my games and when we decided to play in Europe, we reached out to him to help with planning and preparation. We connected right away, and it continues even now.

Ken: Please describe your studies with Coach Delchev.

Stephen: He is pushing me to go way beyond "trick chess" where I would learn a gambit or something that works a few times.

When we study openings now, the emphasis is not so much about the moves

or strict memorization but the IDEAS behind the moves.

It's an entirely different level of chess study.

Ken: That's amazing. What are your current chess goals?

Stephen: I'd like to get the IM title and keep progressing forward.

Ken: What advice do you have for younger chess players?

Stephen: My first piece of advice is that if you want to improve, it's important to be very passionate about chess. You have to enjoy the process.

My second piece of advice is to not let results overwhelm you. Of course, people want to do well. But chess is a difficult sport. If you start caring too much about results, then you can get discouraged when you lose.

Finally, my last piece of advice to young chess players is to view chess outside the box.

Ken: What do you mean by that?

Stephen: Chess, for the most part, is an individual sport. People often incorrectly assume that chess doesn't encourage socialization or friendships. I can tell you that I've met hundreds of players from around the world and now they are a part of my community.

Ken: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Stephen: I believe my faith has given me the skills and the passion for chess. I give back to the community by connecting with people and helping them improve their chess. I'm doing some volunteer work at the Sammamish Library where I teach kids chess basics. As another example, through chess, I got to meet you! I've been reading your articles for some time and now we are meeting!

Ken: It's been a pleasure, Stephen. Check and mate.

"The thing about chess is that it has a way of seeping into your consciousness so much so that you are studying it even when you are relaxing."

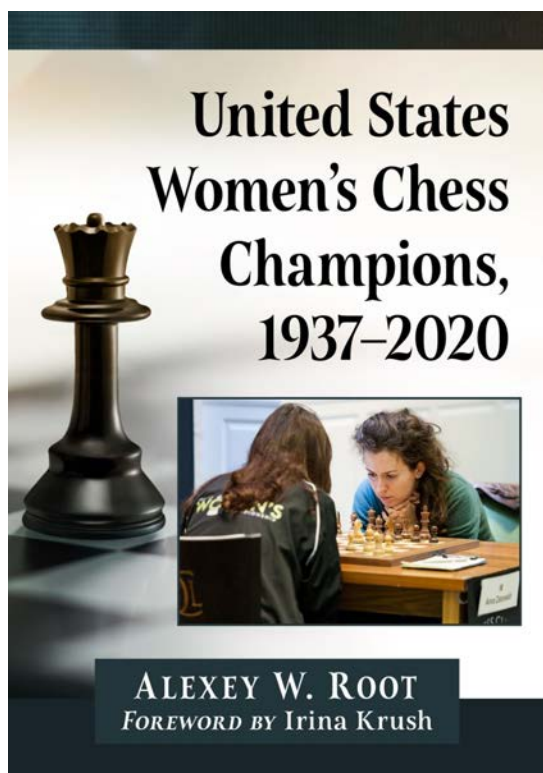


Former Washington Women's Chess Champion and U.S. Women's Chess Champion Dr. Alexey Root will sign copies of *United States Women's Chess Champions, 1937-2020*, available at the site for \$50. After giving a short talk, she will play 10 players simultaneously. To secure a spot in the simul, be one of the first 10 people to register and pay \$60 (\$50 for the book + \$10 for the simul). Pay with Zelle (Tag: wa-chess, ID: washingtonchessfederation@gmail.com) or SettleKing (Washington Chess Federation). Pizza and refreshments provided.



Alexey Root has a Ph.D. in education from UCLA and is a lecturer at The University of Texas at Dallas, teaching education courses that explore the uses of chess. She was the U.S. Women's Champion in 1989. Copies of *United States Women's Champions, 1937-2020* will be for sale at the event.

This photo of Dr. Root is by Crystal Fuller and is courtesy of the Saint Louis Chess Club.



Tuesday, May 12, 2026, 6:00 p.m.

Grand Knights Chess Academy

13620 NE 20th St., Suite K, Bellevue, WA 98005

A Book Review from our Publisher!

Duane Polich

Inside the Mind of Bobby Fischer, published by Siles Press, a division of Silman-James Press Incorporated, and written by International Master John Donaldson (noted chess historian, author and 15 times captain of the U.S. Men's Olympiad Chess Team) is 402 pages chocked full of chess goodness, insights, tidbits and historical nuggets. By revisiting the writings and annotations of Fischer; 11th World Chess champion and the only U.S. born person to achieve that distinction, Donaldson packs 21 chapters into the book, covering the most influential American chess player ever. His games,

starting with the "Game of the Century" against Donald Byrne, and 116 more with analysis and key diagrams. J.D. adds his own notes to many of the games aided by the hindsight of Stockfish 17. Donaldson also dives into the thinking mind of Fischer, his analytical methods and move calculations before the age of computers.

Donaldson doesn't overlook the writings of Bobby, with numerous books, including *My 60 Memorable Games* (many of the games are reprinted in the book), his works for *American Chess Quarterly*, *Chess Life*, and *Boy's*

Life magazines. Bobby wrote an article for *Chessworld* titled "The Ten Greatest Masters in History," which caused a stir by leaving off Emanuel Lasker and Mikhail Botvinnik from the list.

There are numerous historical exhibits courtesy of the World Chess Hall of Fame, including a reprint of a postcard from Fischer to his mommy, lamenting his loss to Tal (in the 1959 Candidates tournament), "that after ten moves I had a forced winning position which I had previously studied." John even includes some odds and ends about Fischer, covering "The Wade Files"

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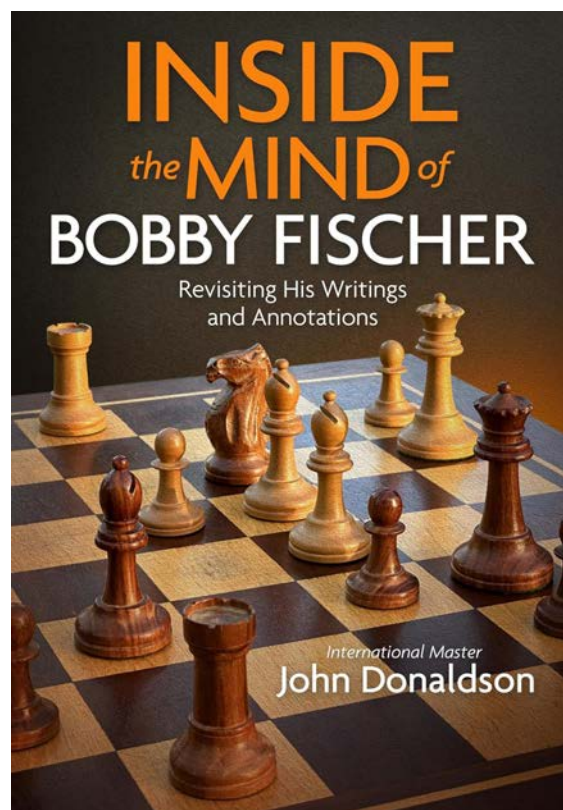


The advertisement for Chess4Life Chess Classes features a photograph of a young boy smiling and playing chess. To the right of the photo, the text reads: 'Chess4Life' in a large, bold font, followed by 'CHESS CLASSES' in blue. Below that, it says 'include individual progress tracking!'. Further down, it says 'START TODAY' in green, followed by 'WITH A FREE ASSESSMENT LESSON ON CHESS4LIFE.COM'. At the bottom, it says 'CLASSES OFFERED Online & In-Person' with a blue arrow pointing to the right. Above the arrow are several small chess pieces in different colors.

named after the English international master, who helped Fischer prepare for the World Championship Cycle, as well as notes from interviews that Bobby did with GM Lubomir Kavalek, in which we find out Bobby's taste in music included soul groups like the Four Tops, The Temptations, Stevie Wonder, and the Supremes, as well as Bob Dylan and the Beatles, among other things. All in all, a well-researched book that complements John's three other books on Fischer.

John tops everything off with a player game index, an ECO index, and an opening index. It's a great book to help you with your chess studies, and a great addition to your chess book collection.

Click on the image to the right for a link to the book on Amazon.com.



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SEATTLE UNIVERSITY CHESS CLUB **CHESS CLASSIC**

SATURDAY, MAY 16, 2026

SEATTLE UNIVERSITY- 901 12TH AVENUE, SEATTLE, WA 98122

Format: An Open Swiss chess tournament in three sections:

- **Championship:** A 4-round, G/50; +10 USCF rated Swiss open to players rated 1600+ USCF. Rounds: 9am, 11:30am, 2:30pm, 5pm. Entry Fee: \$55. \$35 play-up fee if rated 1400-1599 USCF. Free entry for GMs, IMs, WGMs, and WIMs.
- **Premier U1600:** A 4-round, G/50; +10 USCF rated Swiss open to players rated U1600 USCF. Rounds: 9am, 11:30am, 2:30pm, 5pm. Entry Fee: \$55.
- **Casual (18+):** A 5-round, G/25; +5 unrated Swiss open to players from unrated to 1000 USCF. Rounds: 9am, 10:30am, 12:30pm, 2pm, 3:30pm. Entry Fee: \$25. Free entry for Seattle University students.
- **Registration:** nwchess.com/OnlineRegistration

Detective Cookie's

CH^{ESS} CLASSIC

SUNDAY, MAY 17, 2026

RAINIER BEACH COMMUNITY CENTER

8825 RAINIER AVE S, SEATTLE, WA 98118



Seattle
Parks & Recreation



Format

A 5-Round G/25; +5
Swiss in five sections:

K-1 U700

2-3 U800

K-3 Open

4-12 U1000

4-12 Open

Schedule

Arrival: 8-8:45am

Rd. 1 - 9am

Rd. 2 - 10:30am

Rd. 3 - 11:45am

Lunch

Rd. 4 - 1:15pm

Rd. 5 - 2:30pm

Awards ~ 4pm

Eligibility

Open to all students in grades K-12 as of the 2025-26 school year. Out-of-state players welcome!

Entry Fee

\$45. Free for Detective Cookie's Chess Club students. Scholarships available upon request. Max of 200 players; please register early.

Awards

Trophies awarded to the top-finishing players in each section. Team trophies awarded to the top 5 finishing teams (top 4 scores from same school comprise team score) across all sections. Medals for first-timers, best female player, best dressed, and biggest upset win in each section.

Rating

NWSRS rated. Open sections also USCF rated. Higher of current NWSRS or May USCF rating will be used to determine section and pairings.

Registration

Register online at
nwchess.com/online/registration

Pay by Zelle (wa-chess), SettleKing (Washington Chess Federation), or mail a check to WCF.

100% preregistered, no on-site entries or payments. **Registration + payment deadline Sat. May 16 @ 5pm.** No registrations accepted or refunds offered after the deadline.

Clocks

Chess clocks will be used from the start in the Open sections. Clocks not required for the K-1 U700, 2-3 U800, and 4-12 U1000 sections, until a judge places one into unfinished games set for G/10;+5 sec increment after 35 minutes of play.

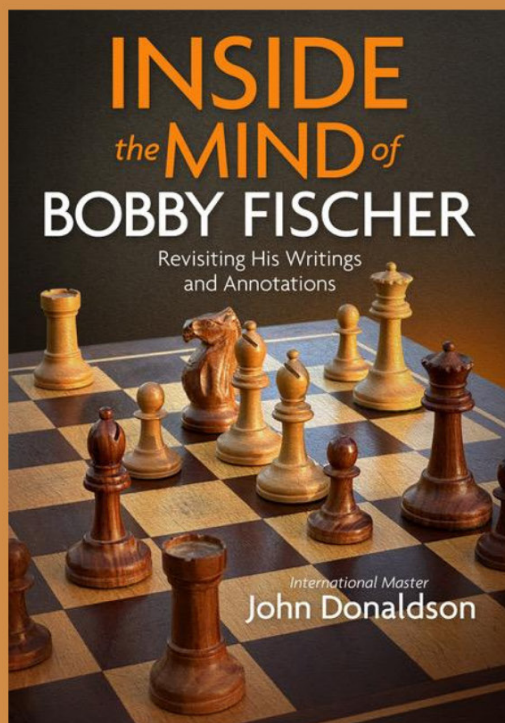
Questions?

Contact: Josh Sinanan, WCF President
206-769-3757,
WashingtonChessFederation@gmail.com

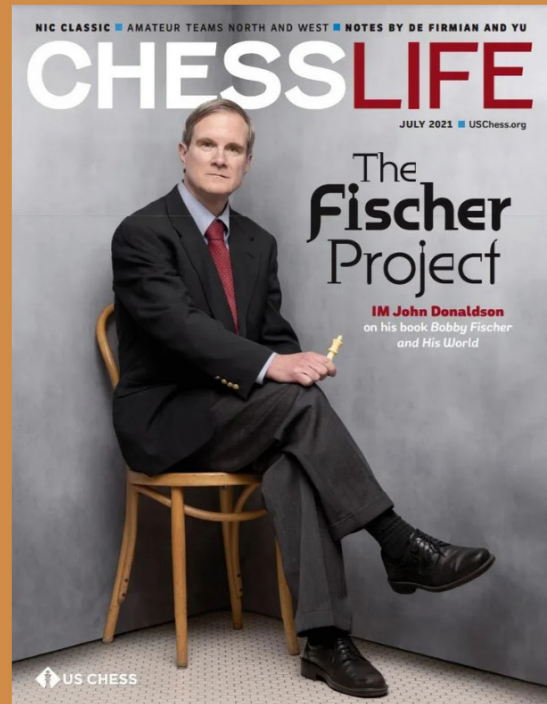
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Join us for an immersive workshop by International Master John Donaldson about the life of legendary Bobby Fischer

- Learn how Bobby Fischer progressed rapidly
- Learn tips on how to prepare for tournaments
- Discover methods to keep yourself motivated



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www.grandknightschess.com
(425) 445-8588



WASHINGTON OPEN

Sat-Mon, May 23-25 2026

Redmond Marriott

7401 164th Ave NE, Redmond, WA 98052

\$15,000 Prize Fund
(based on 200 paid entries)

Main Event:

Format: A 6-round Swiss across 4 sections: Elite (1800+), Premier (U1800), Rising (U1500), and Dynamos (U1200).

Time Controls:

- **3-day:** 30/90, SD/30; +30. Late default: 60 minutes.
- **2-day:** G/55; +15 (rds. 1-3), rds. 4-6 same as for 3-day.

Schedule:

- **3-day option:** Sat @ 10 AM, 6 PM; Sun @ 10 AM, 6 PM; Mon @ 10 AM, 4 PM.
- **2-day option:** Sun @ 9 AM, 11:45 AM, 2:45 PM, then join the 3-day schedule @ 6 PM (from round 4 onward).
- WCF Annual Meeting & Elections: Mon @ 3 PM.

Note: We encourage you to play in the Main Event *and* take part in some side events too (see next page). The schedule permits doing this with minimum or no half-point byes!

Entry Fee: \$150 by Sun, 04/26; \$165 by Sun, 05/10; and \$180 after 05/10 or on-site. Less \$50 for Seniors (age 50+). Playing up one section is allowed (for \$80 extra) if the player's *USCF Regular OTB rating* is within 100 points of the section's lower limit (i.e., min 1700 for Elite, min 1400 for Premier, min 1100 for Rising). Free entry for GMs, IMs, WGMs, WIMs, and USCF 2400+. Re-entry for ½ of original entry fee. Canadians may pay CAD\$ at par.

Rating: Dual rated (USCF & NWSRS), plus Elite, Premier, and Rising sections are FIDE rated too (except G/55 games). Higher of May 2026 USCF and current NWSRS ratings used to determine sections, pairings, and prizes. Higher of USCF and CFC ratings used for Canadian players. Other foreign ratings used for players with no USCF rating, or at TD discretion. Elite, Premier, and Rising sections are paired by USCF rating; Dynamos section is paired by NWSRS rating.

Registration, Information & Payments:

- **Before event:** Online (by Thu, 05/21 @ 5 PM) at NWchess.com/OnlineRegistration/ – pay by SettleKing (Washington Chess Federation) or Zelle (ID: WashingtonChessFederation@gmail.com, Tag: wa-chess), or write a check (payable to WCF; mail to: Josh Sinanan, 4174 148th Ave NE, Building I, Suite M, Redmond, WA 98052). Info: WashingtonChessFederation@gmail.com, 206-769-3757
- **On-site** (cash possible too): Sat, 05/23 @ 8-9 AM for 3-day schedule, or 4:30-5 PM if entering with 1 half-point bye. Sun, 05/24 @ 8-8:30 AM for 2-day schedule, or 9-9:30 AM if entering 3-day schedule with 2 half-point byes. Late registrations may receive a half-point bye for round 1. Max 2 half-point byes available; request before the end of round 2.

Hotel Info:

Redmond Marriott, \$133-\$143/night + tax. One King / Queen / Double or two Queens, single or double occupancy. Call (425) 498-4000 to request the WA Chess Federation block, or use the [online reservation](#). Group code: CFOCFOR. Cut-off date for discounts: Fri, Apr 24, 2026.

Prizes:

- **Elite (1800+):** \$1100, \$900, \$750, \$600, \$450, \$350, \$250; U2100: \$225, \$200; U1900: \$225, \$200
- **Premier (U1800):** \$600, \$450, \$350, \$300, \$250, \$225; U1600: \$200, \$175
- **Rising (U1500):** \$450, \$350, \$300, \$250, \$225, \$200; U1300: \$175, \$150
- **Dynamos (U1200):** \$350, \$300, \$250, \$225, \$200, \$175; U1000: \$175, \$150; Unrated: \$175, \$150

Championship Seeds: Highest finishing Washington resident in the Elite and Premier section is seeded into the 2027 Washington State Championship, in the Championship and Challengers section, respectively. Ties for such a seed will be resolved by post-event playoff games.

Mixed Doubles Prizes: Best mixed gender (incl. male-female) 2-player team's combined score: 1st \$220, 2nd \$170, 3rd \$110. Average team rating must be under 2000; may play in different sections. Register (no extra fee) before round 3. May win a Mixed Doubles prize in addition to other prizes.

Special Prizes (per section):

- **Best Female Player*:** \$75. Requires min 3 eligible players.
- **Best Senior Player* (age 50+):** \$75. Requires min 3 eligible players.
- **Highest (USCF) Rating Gain*:** 1st \$60, 2nd \$30. Requires an established (non-provisional) rating. May not be combined with Biggest Upset Win.
- **Biggest Upset Win (per round):** \$30. Max one per player.
- **Fair-Play, Kindness, Spreading Joy:** \$30. Please nominate.
- **Best Dressed (per day):** \$25. Max one per player.
- **Best Annotated Game:** 1st \$75, 2nd \$50, 3rd \$25. Submit one annotated game that you consider to be interesting and/or well-played. A panel of judges will select winners.

Note: * = May not be combined with equal or higher prizes.

Memberships / Procedures / Miscellaneous:

Current US Chess and WCF / OCF / ICA memberships required; other states accepted. Memberships may be paid at the time of registration. Please bring a digital clock, if available. Wheelchair accessible play area. Pairings posted near the play area and online ~20 mins before each round. If withdrawing or skipping a round, please inform the organizers at least 30 mins before the start of the round.

WASHINGTON OPEN, May 23-25 (cont.)

Fun Side Events!

(many run between rounds of the Main Event)

Washington Open Faustino Oro Scholastic

Sat, 05/23 @ 9 AM – 4 PM (during round 1)

Eligibility: Open to students in grades K-12. Out-of-state players welcome!
Format: Classical and Rapid sections:

- **Classical sections:** A 4-round G/40; +5 Swiss in two sections: **K-3 Open** and **4-12 Open**. For intermediate to advanced players. Dual NWSRS and USCF rated. US Chess membership req'd. Clocks and notation req'd. Rounds: 9:15 AM, 10:45 AM, lunch, 12:45 PM, 2:15 PM. Awards: ~4 PM.
- **Rapid sections:** A 5-round G/25; +5 Swiss in two sections: **K-3 U800** and **4-12 U900**. For novice to low intermediate players. Dual NWSRS and USCF rated. US Chess membership req'd. Clocks req'd. Notation req'd in 4-12 U900, but optional in K-3 U800. Rounds: 9:15 AM, 10:30 AM, lunch, 12 PM, 1:15 PM, 2:30 PM. Awards: ~4 PM.

Entry fee: \$55 if registered by Sat, 05/16; \$65 after. Room for 132 players.

Awards (per section):

- Overall prizes (in Amazon e-gift cards): 1st–5th: \$70 / \$65 / \$60 / \$55 / \$50.
 - Special prizes: Medals for first-timers and for biggest upset win.
 - Top performer (by TPR) in K-3 Open and 4-12 Open wins free entry into the 2-day option of 2026 Washington Open (Main Event) (see prev. page).
- Rating:** Higher of May 2026 USCF or current NWSRS ratings used for sections & pairings.

Registration: 100% pre-registered (NWchess.com/OnlineRegistration/) – pay by SettleKing, Zelle, or check (see above page for details) due **by Fri, 05/22 @ 5 PM**; no on-site entries or payments. Unpaid players will be withdrawn.

Washington Open Gary Dorfner Memorial Adult Novice Swiss

Sat, 05/23 @ 11 AM – 4 PM (during round 1)

A 4-Round Swiss in one section. 1 half-point bye available. For U1200 or unrated adults (18+). No memberships req'd. Unrated. TC: G/30; +5. EF: \$25. Registration: 10:30-10:50 AM. Rounds: 11 AM, 12:15, 1:30, and 2:45 PM. Prize fund: \$400/b20. 1st–3rd: \$150 / \$100 / \$60, 1st U1000 / U700 / Unr \$30.

Washington Open Fischer Chess960 Rapid

Sat, 05/23 @ 2:10 PM – 4:50 PM (between rounds 1 & 2)

A 4-Round Swiss in one section, 1 half-point bye available. Unrated. TC: G/12; +3. EF: \$20. No memberships req'd. Registration: 1:30-2 PM. Rounds: 2:10 PM, 2:50, 3:30, and 4:10 PM. Higher of May 2026 USCF and current NWSRS ratings used for pairings & prizes. Rules: A randomized new opening position explored in each round. Players have 2 minutes before clocks start to examine that opening position. Prize fund: \$300/b20. 1st \$80, 2nd \$60, 3rd \$40, 1st U2000 / U1700 / U1400 / Unrated \$30.

Washington Open Jiner Chess Workshop for Girls & Women

Sat, 05/23 @ 4:30 PM–5 PM and 6 PM–7:30 PM (before & during round 2)

A workshop led by WFM Chouchan Airapetian (chornyaa@msn.com, 206-799-6087), experienced chess coach, organizer, and promoter, former US Women's Championship contender, WCF Girls' and Women's Chess Director. Registration: 4-4:30 PM. EF: Free! Schedule:

4:30-5 PM: "How to develop & cultivate girls' and women's chess" + Q&A.

6-7:30 PM: Complimentary pizza & refreshments, and ladies' bughouse.

Washington Open Evening with IM John Donaldson

Sat, 05/23 @ 5 PM – 5:45+ PM (between rounds 1 & 2)

Led by IM John Donaldson, former coach of the US Olympic Team, former WA State Champion, chess author and historian. EF: Free! Schedule:

5-5:30 PM: Presentation based on a new book about Bobby Fischer.

5:30-5:45 PM: Q&A.

5:45+ PM: Book signing.

Washington Open 4th Annual Carol Kleist Memorial Adult Swiss

Sun-Mon, 05/24-25 @ 11 AM and 4:30 PM (during rounds 3-6)

Sponsored by *Seattle Chess Club (SCC)*, with generous support from Henry Yan. Format: A 4-round Swiss in two sections: Botvinnik (1500+) and

Korchnoi (U1500); may be merged if small. 1 half-point bye available. USCF rated only. TC: G/120; +30. EF: \$50 online (by Sat, 05/23 @ 5 PM) or \$60 on-site; less \$10 for SCC members. EF waived for unrated players who purchase memberships. Registration: Sun, 05/24 @ 10-10:30 AM (unless starting with a half-point bye). US Chess and WCF/OCF/ICA memberships req'd. May 2026 USCF rating used for sections, pairings, & prizes. Guaranteed prize fund: \$1,000.

Botvinnik: 1st \$240, 2nd \$150, 3rd \$120, 1st U1650 \$80.

Korchnoi: 1st \$120, 2nd \$100, 3rd \$80, 1st U1300 \$60, 1st Unrated \$50.

Washington Open Talk by IM John Donaldson

Sun, 05/24 @ 1 PM – 1:50 PM (between rounds 3 & 4)

Led by IM John Donaldson, former coach of the US Olympic Team, former WA State Champion, chess author and historian. EF: Free! Topic: "The History of the Washington State Chess Championship."

Washington Open Carlsen Rapid

Sun, 05/24 @ 2 PM – 5:40 PM (between rounds 3 & 4)

A 5-Round Swiss in two sections: Kasparov (1600+) and Anand (U1600); may be merged if small. 2 half-point byes available. USCF Quick rated; Kasparov section is FIDE Rapid rated too. TC: G/15; +5. EF: \$35 online (by Sat, 05/23 @ 5 PM) or \$40 on-site. Players rated 1500+ may play up into Kasparov (\$10 fee). Current US Chess and WCF/OCF/ICA memberships req'd. Registration: 1-1:45 PM. Rounds: 2 PM, 2:45, 3:30, 4:15, and 5 PM. Highest of May 2026 USCF Quick and current NWSRS rating used for sections, pairings, & prizes. Prize fund: \$1,000/b30.

Kasparov (1600+): 1st–3rd \$150 / \$110 / \$80; 1st U2100 / U1900 / U1700 \$60;

Anand: 1st–3rd \$100 / \$80 / \$60; 1st U1400 / U1200 / U1000 / Unrated \$40;

Biggest Upset Win: \$25 and Best Sportsmanship: \$20 (in each section).

Washington Open Awonder Liang Bughouse

Sun, 05/24 @ 3 PM – 4:15 PM (between rounds 3 & 4)

A 7-round Single Swiss in one section. 2 half-point byes available. Max avg team rating: 1800. Unrated. TC: G/3; +0. EF: \$20/player. No memberships. Register: 2:15-2:45 PM. Rounds: 3 PM, 3:10, 3:20, 3:30, 3:40, 3:50, 4 PM. Higher of May 2026 USCF Blitz and current NWSRS ratings (if unrated, up to 1300, based on age) used for pairings & prizes. Team prizes: \$400 (based on 20 teams): 1st–3rd: \$100 / \$70 / \$50; 1st–3rd K-6: \$50 / \$40 / \$30; Biggest Upset Win: \$30; Best Sportsmanship: \$20.

Washington Open Casablanca Chess Rapid

Mon, 05/25 @ 2 PM – 3:45 PM (between rounds 5 & 6)

A 4-round Swiss in one section. 1 half-point bye available, if requested by end of round 2. Unrated. TC: G/8; +3. EF: \$20. No memberships req'd. Registration: online (by Sun, 05/24) or on-site (Mon @ 1-1:45 PM). Rounds: 2 PM, 2:25, 2:50, and 3:15 PM. Higher of May 2026 USCF and current NWSRS ratings used for pairings & prizes.

Rules: Each round starts in a new *middlegame* position from a historical game. Players have 2 mins before clocks start to examine initial positions.

Prize fund: \$400/b20. 1st \$100, 2nd \$80, 3rd \$60, 1st U2100 \$50, 1st U1800

\$40, 1st U1500 \$30, Biggest Upset Win: \$20.

Washington Open Ignacio Perez Memorial Blitz

Mon, 05/25 @ 8 PM – 10:30 PM (after round 6)

A 10-round Swiss in two sections: Nakamura (1600+) and Tal (U1600); may be merged if small. 3 half-point byes available. USCF Blitz rated; Nakamura section is FIDE Blitz rated too. TC: G/3; +2. EF: \$30 online (by Sun, 05/24 @ 5 PM) or \$35 on-site. Players rated 1500+ may play up into Nakamura (\$10 fee). Current US Chess membership and WCF/OCF/ICA membership req'd. Registration: 7:30-7:50 PM. Rounds: 8 PM, 8:15, 8:30, 8:45, 9, 9:15, 9:30, 9:45, 10, and 10:15 PM. Higher of May 2026 USCF Blitz and current NWSRS ratings used for sections, pairings, & prizes. Prize fund: \$850/b30.

Nakamura: 1st \$120, 2nd \$100, 3rd \$80, 1st U2100 / U1900 / U1700 \$60;

Tal: 1st \$90, 2nd \$75, 3rd \$60, 1st U1400 / U1200 / U1000 \$40, 1st Unr. \$30.

Travel Time: Reykjavík Edition!

The Chess Friends

The Man Benji, The Myth Sarang, and The Legend Vivi

<https://www.chessfriendsbooks.com/blog>



The full Chess Friends Crew with our illustrator and The Man Benji's Mom Sasha (left) and our editor and The Myth Sarang and The Legend Vivaan's Dad Siva (right). Photo credit: Tómas Tandri Jóhannsson

Howdy! It's The Chess Friends!

If you read our blog, chessfriendsbooks.com/blog, you've probably read our article, [Eyes on Iceland!](#) from March 19th. That was no coincidence! With our families, we all traveled to Iceland to compete in the nine-round, seven-day 2026 Reykjavík Open, at the beautiful Harpa Concert Hall in downtown Reykjavík, an adventure we will never forget! By our count, 11 brave Pacific Northwest players competed in the strong 422-player field at the tournament.



This photo of the Harpa building was taken by the event's photographer, Tómas Tandri Jóhannsson. Icelandic Chess Federation (or Skáksamband Íslands) graciously allowed us to use [the event photos](#) to write about our experiences, so huge shoutout to them. One of our favorite and one of the most viewed photos of the entire event (well, after the photos of legendary GM Vasyl Ivanchuk, because he is the GOAT!) was this one (see photo on the article title page to the left):

Folks loved our hoodies as well as our crazy-looking hair! We kind of felt like celebrities! See the person behind taking another photo?! Wow. We promoted our blog, shared many bookmarks and stickers, and had tons of lovely conversations. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. First, let's introduce the tournament!

To give you a bit of history, the very first Reykjavík Open, won by the legend GM Mikhail Tal, was held in the year of 1964. At that time, it was a closed event held biannually, but then converted to an open format running on a yearly basis. Over the years, the tournament grew in size, and featured many famous super GMs. For example, Vasily Smyslov won the event in 1974; Seattle legend Yasser Seirawan was a co-champ in 1990; Levon Aronian, also co-champ, won in 2004; Fabiano Caruana

in 2012; Anish Giri in 2017; Praggnanandhaa Rameshbabu in 2022; and last year in 2025, Parham Maghsoodloo. Icelandic chess legends, Hannes Hlífar Stefánsson and Friðrik Ólafsson won Reykjavík Open titles many times too!

This year, in its 39th edition, the Reykjavík Open was held from March 25th to March 31st. Some favorites were GM M. Amin Tabatabaei from Iran; GM Bogdan Daniel Deac from Romania; GM Vasyl Ivanchuk from Ukraine; GM Maxime Lagarde from France; GM Aryan Tari from Norway, and Benjamin Frederick, Sarang Sankrithi, and Vivaan Sankrithi, all from the USA! OK, just kidding about the last three! In the end, M. Amin Tabatabaei, after seven wins in a row and two draws,

Title	Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Score	Place
GM	Bryce Tiglon	1 ½	1	0	1 ½	1	1 ½				6.5	16
CM	Nikash Vemparala	1	0	1	0 ½	1	0	1	1		5.5	85
CM	Neeraj Harish	0	1 ½	1	0	1	1	0	1		5.5	87
FM	Stephen Willy	½	½	1	1 ½	0	1	0	1		5.5	107
WGM	Zoey Tang	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	5	113
	Isaac Vega	1 ½	0 ½	½	½	½	0	1	1		5	153
	Benjamin Frederick	0	1 ½	0	0	1 ½	½	½	1		4.5	207
AFM	Sridhar Seshadri	0	1	0 ½	0	1	0	0	1		3.5	322
ACM	Siva Sankrithi	0 ½	½	½	0 ½	0	1	½			3.5	348
AFM	Sarang Athreya Sankrithi	1	0	0	0 ½	½	½	½	0		3	360
AFM	Vivaan Krishna Sankrithi	0 ½	0 ½	½	½	0	0	½			2.5	402

was crowned the tournament winner! Congratulations to him!

Also, congratulations to everyone from the Pacific Northwest who played in this tournament! We all deserve a shoutout, but Sridhar Seshadri especially, who, having participated in the event many times before, provided lots of reassurance and support to us all, and whose Sri Chess Academy sponsored pens for all 422 participants!

From the PNW, 11 of us cheered each other on, while hoping we wouldn't get paired against one another (it didn't happen, phew!). Here's a summary of how we all did round by round, compiled via [Chess-Results.com](https://chess-results.com):

As you can see from the table above, Bryce, Nikash, and Neeraj all finished in the top 100, an outstanding achievement given the field that featured over 120 titled players! Bravo! Here are notable results from some of our PNW players, "overperforming" their rating. There were many more but we picked one each to highlight.

Zoey won against GM Leon Livaic (2571) from Croatia!

Stephen drew IM Zhandos Agmanov (2463) from Kazakhstan!

Isaac won against Snorri Vikanes Bjarnason (1988) from Norway!

The Man Benji won against Shardul Paricharak (1895) from Netherlands Antilles!

The Myth Sarang won against Luigi Ardu (1804) from Italy!

The Legend Vivaan drew Emil Jacobsen Jamil (1769) from the Faroe Islands!

Siva drew Michael Schimmer (1797) from Germany!

Sridhar drew Runar Isleifsson (1860) from Iceland!



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The amazing thing about the tournament is that there were people representing 51 different countries/territories! In fact, the three of us Chess Friends played players from 15 different countries/territories during the event, which is almost 30% of the countries/territories in the tournament! In this article, we would like to reflect on our trip and share with you the vibes of the event, where the global chess community got together in a beautiful country to become part of chess history! We'll also share some information about Reykjavík and next year's event, in the hopes that you too could enjoy the wonder of chess and Iceland!

The Man Benji

What were your expectations before the trip?

The Reykjavík Open was a chess tournament I was dreaming about for a few years, but I thought I wasn't strong just yet to enter the field of international players. This year, after playing in the highest sections of the Oregon Open and North American Open, I felt ready to compete among top-level players. It would be my first international tournament, in a country I had never been to before, and I was excited to learn about chess and Iceland, and do my best, with friends by my side!

What things didn't you expect coming to Iceland?

Before this trip, I knew Iceland was a cold country, but, oh boy, I didn't expect it to be that cold in March! When we were leaving Seattle, spring had already sprung, the trees were in full bloom, and it felt silly to wear a heavy coat and boots on the plane. When we landed in Keflavík airport, on an early morning, there was snow on the ground and a snowstorm on the forecast! Good thing I packed my alpaca socks! I love the snow and being in the cold, but I had to remember why I was there and focus on chess. I also didn't expect that Icelandic water could taste so refreshing! You can literally refill your water bottle from the sink in the bathroom! How cool is that? *Pro-tip:* In Iceland, bathrooms are even called Water Closets, abbreviated WC, like World Champion!

What were highlights of your trip?

Many chess players would agree with me that one of the most important things to have during a long chess tournament is ... good food! The food in Iceland was exceptional! I loved trying pizzas from different restaurants (Padre's pizza, Rossopomodoro, and BakaBaka) and other food from local grocery stores. Icelandic yogurt, called skyr, and milk, called mjólk, are the best!



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Walking around the city, and along the water, was out of this world! That feeling, when you step outside, the sudden cold air surrounding you, and crispy snow crunching under your feet makes you want to walk for miles! I remember how before round two, early in the morning, the weather status had a Yellow Warning, meaning severe snow and wind. I stayed at a hotel about a ten-minute walk from Harpa, and it was a unique experience getting to the playing site while battling the weather, walking in a snowstorm with strong gusts of wind and snow blowing into your face, making your skin tingle.

But the biggest highlight was sharing this all with my friends, spending time at the [Hafnartorg Gallery](#) food court—pizza, pasta, burgers, tacos, sushi, all you can ask for—never mind a win, draw or loss, still having fun. Those moments together made the trip an unforgettable event!

What did you learn about Iceland?

During the tournament, on days when we had only one game in the evening, we usually had time to walk around Reykjavík and explore its museums to learn about the country. In [Perlan Museum](#), I learned about volcanic activity, ice caves, and the Northern Lights. In the [Settlement Exhibition](#) and the [World in Words](#) exhibit at the University Library, I learned about vikings and Ingólfur Arnarson, who was the first settler of Reykjavík, a place covered in trees at that time! I also learned about sagas (old Icelandic manuscripts), and how life was back in the early days!

What are your chess reflections?

The tournament felt like a festival. In a colorful building, where a large playing hall overlooked the bay, 200+ chessboards were set up, and over 400 players—strong amateurs to super grandmasters—from all over the world, met, played, and had fun. On and off the board, many stories were being unraveled, and I was happy to be part of it all. I met some nice people, made friends, and learned a lot about chess. In my nine rounds, I played people from nine different countries, like Australia, Germany, India, and even Netherlands Antilles! In my first round, I was paired up against a streamer from Australia, Hannah Sayce, who we even talked about in [one of our blogs](#)! I got to play on a DGT board, in front of a camera! Not gonna lie, it was a bit stressful at first. Before the round, I told Hannah about The Chess Friends blog, gave her our bookmark and Peshka stickers, and she was really nice!

Can you share one of your chess positions?

In Round seven, I was paired up as Black against a player

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from France, Benjamin Spagnoli, so the game quickly became known as “The Battle of Benjamins.” I found myself facing the Scotch game, which is not the most common opening in classical. Nevertheless, I think I held pretty well, even entering the endgame two pawns up, but French Benjamin’s passed pawn was worth my two, and his pieces were more coordinated. I was on the defending side. When we reached move 41, I exhaled, having 15 extra minutes on the clock, but White was pressing. His c-pawn was dominating, and his rook was about to start munching my pawns. If I don’t find the right move, my position collapses.



How do I break the tension? The answer: Sacrifice THE ROOOOOK!

41... Rbxc6! (Rcxc6 also works)

42. Nxc6 Rxc6

Which side do you prefer here? Eventually, we traded all the pawns, and I had to hold a R+R vs R+N endgame, and, after almost 5 hours, the game ended in a draw. Perhaps as it should be, because, I mean, in a Battle of Benjamins, who do you root for?

The Myth Sarang

What were your expectations before the trip?

I had the pleasure of visiting Reykjavík briefly while returning home from the 2024 Paris Olympic games. Even then, it captured my heart as the best city in the world! When this opportunity presented itself to attend the Reykjavík Open, one of the most prestigious chess tournaments in the world, in my favorite city, I was ecstatic! Going into the event, I knew I was near the bottom of the field but also knew my capability. I was excited to prove myself.

What things didn't you expect coming to Iceland?

I didn't expect it to be so cold in March, just like The Man Benji. For some reason, I wore four layers on the plane, which felt weird: a short sleeve shirt, a black hoodie, the Chess Friends hoodie and my blue jacket. Good thing I brought a bunch of Merino wool long-sleeve shirts, socks and underwear! I really recommend Merino wool if you are going to Iceland as it doesn't get smelly and you can re-wear it and save space!

What were highlights of your trip?

It was very nice meeting my Dad's former student, my

friend, and the one who introduced me to my coach, GM Bryce Tiglon. He gave me one of the greatest pieces of advice I will carry forward into my future chess games: ***There is no such thing as a drawn position.*** He explained to me that even in positions that are “dead drawn,” it is important to trust your training and push to find advantages and break through, as he did in several of his games this event. I also climbed the Þúfa hill together with Bryce and Dad in the wind, ice, and snow, to take in some incredible views of Reykjavík and share stories and insights. It was also lovely to spend lots of time with my Mom, Dad, and brother and take in the sights of a beautiful city.

What did you learn about Iceland?

The food in Reykjavík is the best! So much variety! I recommend [Posthus food hall](#) feat. Yuzu, Funky Bhangra, Fukumama, and more, with different culinary twists at every restaurant. Ramen Momo, the first ever Ramen house in Iceland, was a great surprise, and super traditional. I highly recommend the yuja tea. Lastly, I would highly recommend [Gandhi](#), a lovely Indian restaurant with incredible paneer tikka masala and delectable onion pakoras. Overall, it was my favorite tournament experience and travel experience, and I can't wait to return again for a future event!

What are your chess reflections?

I ended up “playing up” all nine games this tournament, and scored a solid 3.0/9 with four draws and a win, along with four close losses. I felt I did a great job using my time and calculating deeply and thought more positionally than ever. Upon reflection, the moves I played too quickly were my biggest mistakes, giving opponents small advantages they converted well. I will improve on this. I was also pleased by my resilience, in that I was worse in many games and fought hard to come back and get a result.

Can you share one of your chess positions?

This position came versus Luigi Ardu from Italy. Do you all see the plan for Black, aka me? ...fxe5, Rxd5 Qxd5 and Black is much better. This happened and Black converted the advantage for the win.



The Legend Vivaan

What were your expectations before the trip?

I am eight, and I knew I would be one of the youngest players in this edition of the Reykjavík Open. I am really into basketball right now, play every day, and was hoping to hoop, at least a little, while in Iceland.



What things didn't you expect coming to Iceland?

The underground passages to get from place to place and avoid the crazy wind were a nice surprise. I like a blizzard as much as the next guy; in fact Blizzards is the name of my basketball team, but I'm not a super big guy yet, so the wind can push me pretty hard!

What were highlights of your trip?

Perlan Museum was AMAZING! It's all about the wonders of Iceland, like ice caves, volcanoes, and aurora. I also loved that we got to sit courtside at a professional Icelandic basketball game, a crazy match between KR Reykjavík and Tindastóll! We also got to play on that court the day after. As you may know, I love basketball, and am a little crazy, like my dad, so we went out and hooped in snow multiple days as well! Fortunately, our bathroom floors were heated so we could dry our socks after!

What did you learn about Iceland?

If you don't mind the snow, there are many lovely parks in Reykjavík, like Hallargarðurinn, which has the half-frozen Tjörnin pond where you can say hi to ducks and swans! There is also Klambartún, which has a playground and was the main place I went to play snow basketball. If you're looking for some swimming but don't want to go all the way to the Blue Lagoon, try out [Laugardalslaug Pool](#), which has geothermally heated pools, beach volleyball, and basketball courts, plus the Reykjavík Zoo is right next door.

What are your chess reflections?

I loved meeting people from all over the world and making new friends. It was super cool to watch many top players play as I was walking around, including Super GM champion Amin Tabatabaei, top 30 in the world!

Can you share one of your chess positions?



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Coldwell Banker Bain

Instead of highlighting my games, I want to give a shoutout to our WGM/IM Zoey Tang! In Round five, Zoey, playing White, faced GM Leon Livaic of Croatia, on one of the top DGT boards. In an equal endgame, under time pressure, Leon made a mistake. Zoey, also with little time on her clock, found a lively finish. Can you spot the winning plan for White?



55. Nd4 is crushing! The knight is having too much fun! The game proceeded

55... Rb2, 56. Nf5 Bxf5, 57. h7 and Black resigned. Note if Bxh7, White has Rh6#!

Are you imagining yourself at next year's Reykjavík Open? We hope so! The dates are already set: March 17th to March 23rd, 2027! It will be the 40th anniversary! Follow the website <https://www.reykjavikopen.com>, where the organizers will announce registration and open the payment link once they are ready. The fee for the tournament is prorated based on your rating and birth year, so click on the right link! The website will also have links to discounted hotels near the playing venue, and discounts to take bus excursions if you choose to do so. Icelandair has good deals to direct flights to Reykjavík from Seattle, usually in November, so don't miss those (our tickets cost around \$500 roundtrip). Also, when you arrive at the Keflavík airport, you still have a 50-minute drive to downtown Reykjavík. You could get a taxi, which is very expensive, or you could take the Flybus, which is also discounted for chess players, and you can pre-book your tickets through the Reykjavík Open website! Pack warm clothes and be ready for lots of good chess! Watch out, Iceland! The Pacific Northwest chess crew is coming to town once again!

Three Cheers, Fellow Future Master Chess Friends!

The Man Benji, The Myth Sarang, The Legend Vivaan



Washington Father's Day Open



June 20-21, 2026

Hotel 116 Bellevue

625 116th Ave NE, Bellevue, WA 98004

Format: A 5-round Swiss in three sections: **Yoda Open**, **Boba Fett U1700**, and **Chewbacca U1200**.

Entry fee: \$110 by 6/13, \$140 after. \$60 play-up fee if rated 1500-1699 or 1000-1199 in both NWSRS and USCF and playing up in Yoda Open or Boba Fett U1700, respectively. Chess Jedis rated 2200+ USCF receive a \$50 discount. Open to all junior + adult players. Maximum of 200 players, please register early to reserve your spot!

Schedule: Arrival: 8-8:45am. Rounds: Saturday @ 9am, 2pm, 7pm. Sunday @ 10am, 3pm.

Father's Day Blitz: ~ 7pm or asap.

Time Control: G/90; +30. Late default: 60 minutes.

Rating: Triple rated in NWSRS, USCF, and FIDE. Higher of June 2026 USCF or current NWSRS rating used to determine section, pairings, and prizes. Higher of USCF or foreign rating used at TD discretion.

Memberships: US Chess and WCF/OCF/ICA memberships required; must be paid at the time of registration.

Prize Fund: \$5,500 based on 100 paid entries.

Yoda Open: 1st-4th: \$500-\$400-\$300-\$250. 1st-2nd U2100: \$175-\$150, 1st-2nd U1900: \$175-\$150.

Boba Fett U1700: 1st-4th: \$400-\$300-\$200-\$150, 1st-2nd U1600: \$125-\$100, 1st-2nd U1400: \$125-\$100.

Chewbacca U1200: 1st-4th: \$300-\$250-\$200-\$150, 1st-2nd U1000: \$100-\$75, 1st-2nd U800: \$100-\$75.

Special Prizes (per section):

Skywalker Biggest Upset Win: \$20/rd., Leia Best Female Player (by TPR): \$50, Han Solo Best Dressed: \$20/day, Obi-Wan Best Dad Player (by TPR): \$50, Darth Vader Best Parent/Child Team (by avg. TPR): \$50.

Byes: Up to 2 half-point byes available if requested before the end of round 2.

Registration: Online at nwchess.com/OnlineRegistration. Pay by SettleKing (Washington Chess Federation), Zelle (Tag: wa-chess, ID: washingtonchessfederation@gmail.com), or mail a check to WCF. Registration and payment **deadline: Fri. 6/19 @ 5pm**. No registrations accepted or refunds offered after the deadline.

Father's Day Blitz: Sunday 7-9:30pm (after rd. 5 of main tournament). **Entry Fee:** \$30. **Format:** A 9-Round Single Swiss in one section, 2 half-point byes available. Dual USCF Blitz + FIDE Blitz rated. **TC:** G/3; +2. **On-site registration:** 6:00-6:45pm. Rds. Sun @ 7pm, 7:15, 7:30, 7:45, 8, 8:15, 8:30, 8:45, 9pm. Closing Ceremony ~ 9:15pm or asap. Current US Chess membership required. Higher of June 2026 USCF Blitz or Regular rating used to determine pairings and prizes.

Prize Fund: \$750 (based on 50 paid entries)

1st – 3rd: \$170-140-100, 1st U2000/U1700/U1400/U1100/Unrated: \$50. Biggest upset win: \$10/rd.

Questions – Josh Sinanan, WCF President, 206-769-3757, washingtonchessfederation@gmail.com

2026 Washington State Championship

By
Josh Sinanan



Viktors Pupols
Photo credit: Ani Barua

The 2026 Washington State Championship took place at Lakeside School in Seattle during the weekends of February 6-8 and 21-22. A new format consisting of five games the first weekend, a week off for Mid-Winter break and President’s Day weekend, followed by four more games the next weekend was in effect. The idea was to allow players more time to recover from the first weekend of play and to keep President’s Day weekend open for those participating in norm events as well as the popular President’s Cup, which took place in Bellevue on the in-between weekend. Compared to the previous Washington State Championship’s eight Round Robin sections, this year’s edition featured only six: Championship, Premier, Invitational, Challengers, Rising Stars, and Prodigies. Attendance was likely down due to the busy slate of chess events happening throughout the Seattle area during the winter “chess season.”

As is customary for this event, the fields of each section were determined by seeding and rating, which was based on the average January 1st, 2026, live ratings of: (a) the USCF regular & FIDE for the top two sections; or (b) USCF regular & NWSRS for all other sections. All sections were triple rated in NWSRS, USCF, and FIDE. The WCF Dream Team of FA Mani Atikankhotchasee, newly minted Senior TD and FIDE National Arbiter Ani Barua, and Scholastic Director Allen Messenger orchestrated the proceedings.



The luminous Wright Community Center, seen here at dusk in the heart of the Lakeside Upper School campus, hosted this year’s Washington State Championship.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.

The event was hosted by the Washington Chess Federation and organized under the guidance of Tournament Coordinator Valentin Razmov and President Josh Sinanan. Photographers extraordinaire Meiling Cheng and Ann Jem attended both weekends and chronicled key moments of the event through their

incisive photographic lenses and artistic video footage.

Championship

Sammamish chess prince FM Stephen Willy was crowned king and

Washington State Championship

Pairing#	Name	USCF Rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total pts	Tie-break (Berger)	Place
1	Harishkumar Karthikeyan	2164	♔	0.5	0.5	0	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	0.5	2	7.5	9th
2	FM Tian Sang	2288	0.5	♔							1	0	1.5	6	
3	FM Ryan Porter	2275	0.5		♔	0.5	0	0	0	1	0.5	1	3.5	11.5	6th
4	CM Ananth Gottumukkala	2161	1		0.5	♔	0	0.5	1	0.5	0	0.5	4	13.25	4th-5th
5	FM Stephen Willy	2283	1		1	1	♔	0	1	1	1	1	7	25	1st
6	NM Vidip Kona	2246	0.5		1	0.5	1	♔	0	0.5	0	0.5	4	16.5	4th-5th
7	FM Ted Wang	2301	0.5		1	0	0	1	♔	1	0.5	0.5	4.5	15.5	3rd
8	NM Bertrand Wan	2233	1		0	0.5	0	0.5	0	♔	0	1	3	9	7th-8th
9	NM Nikash Vemparala	2261	1	0	0.5	1	0	1	0.5	1	♔	0	5	17	2nd
10	FM Megan Lee	2366	0.5	1	0	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	1	♔	3	12.25	7th-8th



*The playing hall of the 2026 Washington State Championship.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.*

became the 2026 Washington State Champion, scoring an impressive seven points from nine games. After a first-round loss against dark horse Vidip Kona (2246), Willy recovered well and managed

to create complications in each of his games, relying on his amazing calculation abilities to navigate unclear and messy positions. Congratulations Stephen! The third round forfeit of FM Tian Sang after

an unfortunate mix-up of the round times reduced the Championship field to just nine players and resulted in a few players, including Willy, playing only eight games instead of the original nine. NM Nikash Vemparala of Redmond took second place with five points. Medina chess prodigy Ted Wang captured third place honors a half-point behind Vemparala with 4.5 points thanks to a clutch win in a superior rook ending against 2025 Washington State Champion FM Ryan Porter. CM Ananth Gottumukkala of Sammamish and NM Vidip Kona of Duvall rounded out the prize winners with four points apiece.

Premier

Mercer Island High School tenth grader William Summerfield topped the Premier with a dominant eight points from nine games, allowing only two draws against Gabriel Razmov (2017) and Pratik Thorwe (2008). Summerfield, who studies chess through Chess4Life, raised his USCF rating by nearly 200 points and will no doubt gain the master title very soon. Two chess warriors, Neevan R. Saddi of Issaquah and Miles Kuipers of Bellevue, shared second/third place two and a half points back. Up-and-comers CM Rafael Palathingal of Bothell and NM Neeraj Harish of Redmond shared fourth/fifth place, each with a solid “plus one” score.

Washington State Premier

Pairing#	Name	USCF Rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total pts	Tie-break (Berger)	Place
1	CM Rafael Palathingal	2092	♔	1	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	1	0.5	0	5	19.25	4th-5th
2	NM Neeraj Harish	2156	0	♔	1	1	0.5	0.5	0	1	1	0	5	18	4th-5th
3	Gabriel Razmov	2017	1	0	♔	0.5	0.5	0	0	1	0	0.5	3.5	15.25	7th-9th
4	NM Viktors Pupols	2200	0.5	0	0.5	♔	0.5	0.5	1	1	0	0	4	14.75	6th
5	Neevan Reddy Saddi	2084	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	♔	0.5	1	1	1	0	5.5	20	2nd-3rd
6	Miles Kuipers	2037	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	♔	1	0.5	1	0	5.5	21	2nd-3rd
7	Pratik Thorwe	2025	0	1	1	0	0	0	♔	1	0	0.5	3.5	14	7th-9th
8	Shawn Li	1796	0	0	0	0	0	0.5	0	♔	1	0	1.5	6.25	10th
9	NM Andrew Fletcher	2215	0.5	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	♔	0	3.5	13.5	7th-9th
10	William Summerfield	1980	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	♔	8	33.5	1st

Invitational

Akim Pikh, a sixth grader based in Sammamish, won the Invitational section with seven points from nine games. Pikh recovered well from his fifth-round loss against Dhingra (1949) and won his last three games in a row to finish a full point ahead of the field. Napavine's Brian Lee captured second place honors with six points thanks to his decisive mindset; he was the only Invitational player to not draw a single game! Two rising chess stars, Sangeeta Dhingra of Seattle and Nikhil Ramkumar of Bothell, shared third/fourth place with five points apiece. Redmond-based veteran Yevgeniy Rozenfeld, who makes it a point each year to play in the Washington State Championship, rounded out the prize winners with a par score.

Challengers

Bothell middle schooler Vishnu Mohan won the Challengers section with an impressive eight points from nine games, allowing just two draws against Zhou (1808) and Shankaranand (1657) along the way. Former Washington State Girls Champion Selina Cheng from Seattle captured second place with six points, recovering well after a first-round loss to Mohan to go undefeated in her remaining eight games. Tenth-grade



Invitational winner Akim Pikh plots his next move.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.

Washington State Invitational

Pairing#	Name	USCF Rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total pts	Tie-break (Berger)	Place
1	Akim Pikh	1968	♔	0.5	1	1	0	0.5	1	1	1	1	7	30	1st
2	Valentin Razmov	1818	0.5	♔	0	0	0	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	3	14.5	9th-10th
3	Odbayar Yondon	1837	0	1	♔	0	0.5	1	0	1	0	0.5	4	15	6th-7th
4	Brian Lee	2030	0	1	1	♔	1	0	1	0	1	1	6	25	2nd
5	Sangeeta Dhingra	1948	1	1	0.5	0	♔	1	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	5	21.5	3rd-4th
6	Vijay Nallappa	1863	0.5	1	0	1	0	♔	0.5	0	0	0	3	14.25	9th-10th
7	Arnav Gadde	1840	0	0.5	1	0	0.5	0.5	♔	0.5	0.5	0	3.5	13.75	8th
8	Saiya Karamali	1782	0	0.5	0	1	1	1	0.5	♔	0	0	4	17.25	6th-7th
9	Yevgeniy Rozenfeld	1994	0	0.5	1	0	0.5	1	0.5	1	♔	0	4.5	16.75	5th
10	Nikhil Ramkumar	1903	0	0	0.5	0	0.5	1	1	1	1	♔	5	19.5	3rd-4th



*Nikash Vemparala in full concentration mode.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.*

phenom Brook Ayalew from Detective Cookie's Chess Club in Seattle earned the third place prize a half-point back and was the recipient of a forfeit win in the final round when his scheduled opponent Imai Maharaja fell ill on the last day of play. WCM Mary Kuhner of Seattle finished in fourth place thanks to a three-game mid-tournament winning streak. Eastside powerhouses Yuchen Zhou of Bellevue and Christos Boulis of Redmond rounded out the prize winners each with an even 4.5-point score.

Rising Stars

North Bend middle-schooler Rushil Singh edged out his nearest rivals to claim victory in the closely contested Rising Stars section with 6.5 points from nine games. With a span of only 200 rating points from top to bottom, this was by far the section with the most parity in terms of level matchups, with all players ranging from 1400 to 1600 in USCF rating. A trio of supernovas shared second/fourth place honors a half-point back with six points apiece: Peng-Ruei Pan of Sammamish, Krishang Gupta of Everett, and Andra Marinescu of Renton. Bellevue third grader Skandha Raj finished in fifth place a half-point back thanks to a clutch final round win against Zhu (1455).

Washington State Challengers

Pairing#	Name	USCF Rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total pts	Tie-break (Berger)	Place
1	Yuchen Zhou	1836	♔	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0	1	1	4.5	18.5	=5th
2	Imai Maharaja	1540	0.5	♔	0.5	0.5	1	1	0	0	0	0	3.5	15	8th
3	Vihaan Pai	1597	0.5	0.5	♔	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	1.5	6	10th
4	Selina Cheng	1721	0.5	0.5	1	♔	0.5	1	0	1	1	0.5	6	22.75	2nd
5	Deeksha Shankaranand	1674	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	♔	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	1	4	18.25	7th
6	WCM Mary Kuhner	1787	1	0	1	0	0.5	♔	0	1	1	0.5	5	18.25	4th
7	Vishnu Mohan	1883	0.5	1	1	1	0.5	1	♔	1	1	1	8	32.75	1st
8	Brook Ayalew	1809	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	♔	1	0.5	5.5	18.25	3rd
9	Austin Wentz	1829	0	1	1	0	0.5	0	0	0	♔	0	2.5	7	9th
10	Christos Boulis	1728	0	1	1	0.5	0	0.5	0	0.5	1	♔	4.5	15.75	=5th



*Neevan R. Saddi defends with the black pieces against the legendary Viktors Pupols.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.*

Prodigies

Elina Khudyev, a third grader from Open Window School in Bellevue, emerged victorious in the youthful Prodigies section with an undefeated 7.5 points. Along the way, Khudyev allowed just three draws against her nearest rivals Chaudhuri (1180), Sreraman (1199), and Han (1257). Medina Elementary second grade student Felix Han earned the second-place prize with 6.5 points. Third place was awarded to Bothell chess stud Rohit Sreraman, whose six-point score materialized from a clutch final-round victory against Medina high school student Kaamil Siddiqui (1412). Sammamish sixth grader Arihant Chaudhuri, whose twin brother Agnivesh also plays some chess, captured the fourth place prize with 5.5 points thanks to winning his final three games. Cascadia Elementary third grader George Yeh from Seattle finished with five points and took home the fifth place prize in his first ever Washington State Championship. With so many prodigies abound, the future of Washington Chess is certainly bright!

Several of the players have graciously submitted chess bios and annotated games from the tournament for the Northwest Chess readers to enjoy.

Washington State Rising Stars

Pairing#	Name	USCF Rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total pts	Tie-break (Berger)	Place
1	Peng-Ruei Pan	1519	♔	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	6	20.5	2nd-4th
2	Skandha Raj	1558	0	♔	1	0.5	1	1	0	1	1	0	5.5	18	5th
3	Sambuddha Sekhar Das	1533	0	0	♔	1	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	1	0.5	4	16.25	6th
4	Krishang Gupta	1523	1	0.5	0	♔	0.5	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	6	25.75	2nd-4th
5	Loida Guo	1458	0	0	0.5	0.5	♔	0	0.5	1	1	0	3.5	13.75	7th-8th
6	Aahan Sriram	1397	0	0	0.5	0	1	♔	0	0.5	0	0	2	6.5	9th-10th
7	Rushil Singh	1490	1	1	1	0	0.5	1	♔	1	0	1	6.5	27.25	1st
8	Aiden Zhu	1537	0	0	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	♔	1	0	2	6.5	9th-10th
9	Ziliang Ma	1447	0	0	0	0.5	0	1	1	0	♔	1	3.5	17.5	7th-8th
10	Andra Marinescu	1458	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	1	0	1	0	♔	6	24	2nd-4th

Player Bio

William Summerfield



My name is William Summerfield. I am now in tenth grade. I have been playing chess since the age of five, and I still remember when my brother used to ask, "are you suuure you want to do that?" as I was making my moves. I have found inspiration in watching Gotham Chess and Ben Finegold videos. I have honed many

chess skills over the years participating in chess instruction and competition through Chess4Life in Bellevue.

During family trips to Saint Louis, I have enjoyed visiting the World Chess Hall of Fame and Saint Louis Chess Club.

In addition to playing chess, I enjoy mathematics, snow skiing, basketball, and flying model airplanes.

**William Summerfield (2049) –
Shawn Li (1791) [D37]**

Washington State Championship
Premier (R6), February 21, 2026
[William Summerfield]

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.c4

We initially developed into an Indian game.

**3...d5 4.Nc3 Be7 5.Bf4 a6 6.e3 0-0 7.Rc1
b6 8.a3 Bb7**

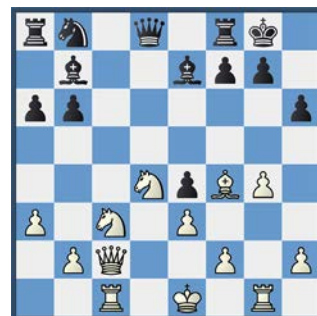


Position after 8...Bb7

9.cxd5

I did not want to allow his bishop to participate in the battle. So, I exchanged the pawn, knowing that recapturing with the pawn was his only decent option.

**9...exd5 10.Bd3 h6 11.g4 c5 12.Rg1 cxd4
13.Nxd4 Ne4 14.Bxe4 dxe4 15.Qc2**



Position after 15.Qc2

This move was a mistake because even though it pressures the e4 pawn, my opponent still has a lot of compensation with good development opportunities.

15...Qc8 16.Nf5

This was another slight mistake. Nd5 would have put more pressure on his pieces.

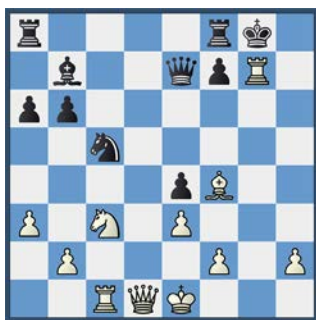
**16...Qe6 17.Nxe7+ Qxe7 18.g5 hgx5
19.Rxg5 Nd7 20.Qd1 Nc5**

This move is a mistake because it allows White to put pressure on the black king.

21.Rxg7+!!

Washington State Prodigies

Pairing#	Name	USCF Rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total pts	Tie-break (Berger)	Place
1	Felix Han	1287		1	1	0.5	1	0	1	0.5	0.5	1	6.5	30.25	2nd
2	George Yeh	1306	0		0.5	1	1	1	0.5	0	1	0	5	15	5th
3	Arihant Chaudhuri	1193	0	0.5		0.5	1	1	1	0.5	0	1	5.5	21	4th
4	Siana Razmov	1113	0.5	0	0.5		0.5	1	0	0	0	0	2.5	8	8th
5	Kaamil Siddiqui	1464 (P7)	0	0	0	0.5		1	0	0	0.5	0	2	4.5	9th
6	Ameya George	790	1	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	1	6.5	10th
7	Fuxing Zou	1131	0	0.5	0	1	1	1		0	1	0	4.5	12.5	6th-7th
8	Elina Khudiyev	1372	0.5	1	0.5	1	1	1	1		1	0.5	7.5	28.5	1st
9	Rahul Sreraman	1325	0.5	0	1	1	0.5	1	0	0		0.5	4.5	16.25	6th-7th
10	Rohit Sreraman	1208	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5		6	21	3rd



Position after 21.Rxg7+

This was the key move to capitalize on my advantage. When I first considered this rook sacrifice, I remembered The Gotham Chess meme about sacking the rook. I could hear Levi's loud voice imploring me to "sack the rook!" I didn't see a checkmate, but I thought I would have a great positional advantage and gain some material. I envisioned capturing a queen and two pawns in exchange for my two rooks. Before committing to the sacrifice, I spent about 15 minutes analyzing and verifying that every combination of moves by my opponent would be losing.

21...Kxg7 22.Qg4+ Kh8

...Kh8 and ...Kh7 were Black's only good options because if ...Kf6, there is Bg5+ with loss of the queen.

23.Qh5+ Kg8 24.Ke2

Ke2 is the only move that maintains the large advantage. This quiet move allows the rook to join the attack.

24...f6 25.Rg1+ Qg7 26.Rxg7+ Kxg7 27.Bh6+ Kh7 28.Bxf8+ Kg8 29.Bxc5 bxc5 30.Qg6+ Kh8 31.Qxf6+ Kg8 32.Nd5

This knight sacrifice is a nice finishing touch to the game because Black's best option is to capture the knight. But White still has Qg5+ to win the black bishop.

32...Bxd5 33.Qg5+ Kf8 34.Qxd5 Re8 35.Qxc5+ Kf7 36.Qh5+



Position after 36.Qh5+

After Qh5+, my opponent resigned because I was going to sack the queen for the rook and eventually win an endgame of five pawns against two pawns.

1-0

**Stephen Willy (2283) –
Ryan W. Porter (2281) [D31]**
Washington State Championship
Championship (R7), February 21, 2026
[Ryan Porter]

I chose to annotate this game for two reasons: (1) At the time, I was half a point behind Stephen, who was in clear first at 4/5. It became moot after he ran away from the field, but it felt important at the time. (2) It's an opportunity to discuss how I handle shaky memory of opening prep. I've never been blessed with a great memory, and (spoiler alert!) it doesn't get better with age. So, I've gotten quite a bit of practice at this.

1.d4

I was already surprised, since Stephen normally plays e4.

1...d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 c6

This is probably my third most common

response to d4, which I chose because I figured he would be better prepared for other lines that I had played more commonly recently.

4.e4

The start of the Marshall Gambit, which is a very sharp opening. In retrospect, perhaps allowing such a dynamic option was a mistake against a player who thrives in such positions. Given the speed with which he played the following moves, I certainly didn't enter a position that he was less familiar with.

4...dxe4 5.Nxe4 Bb4+ 6.Bd2 Qxd4 7.Bxb4 Qxe4+ 8.Be2 Na6 9.Ba5 b6 10.Qd6 Bd7 11.Bc3 f6 12.0-0-0



Position after 12.0-0-0

Here I went into the tank for my first serious think. I've studied this position several times, but there are multiple related lines that always confuse me. White can either play Rd1 or 0-0-0, before or after playing Nf3. Black's best response can either be ...Nc5, ...Rd8, or ...0-0-0, based on what combination White plays. So, now's a good time to discuss some lessons I've learned about how to handle such situations. (1) No matter how certain you are that a move is theory, don't play it if you don't like the position at the end of your over-the-board analysis (unless, of course, you like the alternatives even

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- Spokane City Champion 2022
- 2032 USCF Rating
- UW Grad
- Eagle Scout

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less). One reason is that the mind has a great capacity to find the nearest match and trick you into thinking you've seen a position when it's actually subtly different. Another reason is that you have to play the resulting position yourself. If you don't like it, then you probably don't know how to play it well. (This approach actually hurt me in a separate game in this tournament, but I have no regrets. Instead, my takeaway is that I need to lock in more when studying openings, so that I do some of this analysis ahead of time, while studying.) (2) Do your own analysis of the position over the board, trying your best to not base it on lines you think you remember. I find this to be much more productive than what I used to do—mentally beating myself up, in hopes that banging my head against the wall would eventually unlock the memory of the theoretical move. One benefit I've found from digging into the position is that sometimes I'll stumble upon a position a couple moves deeper that I am sure I've studied, increasing my confidence that I've correctly reconstructed the theory.

12...0-0-0

Now, it's time to apply the approach. One move that's often played in these types of positions is 12...Nc5?? but that obviously fails to 13.b4; I much more serious alternative to consider is 12...Rd8 but this allows 13.Bh5+ g6 14.Be2± It may look like White has just wasted a tempo, but weakening the a1–h8 diagonal is a huge deal in these lines. Black's king will never find safety. Lastly, I looked at the move I played of ...0-0-0. I couldn't find anything explicitly wrong with it, and I was almost certain that the best move was one of the three candidate moves. So, I played it after an almost 20-minute think, and it was indeed theory.

13.Qa3 Kb7 14.Bf3 Qf4+

14...Qxc4?? 15.Be2+-

15.Rd2

For moves 13 through 17, I wasn't sure whether I had studied the position before. But my opening study was working in the best way it can, by teaching the right ideas to apply. At this point, Black wants to get ...e5 in, both to restrict White's knight when it gets to e2, and to eventually free up Black's bishop. However, we don't want to shut the door on the queen, who can also be a key defender.

15...Qc7 16.Ne2 e5 17.Rhd1 Nh6=

This position has occurred eight times in MegaBase, but it took 40 minutes to get here, while White took ten.

18.b4

I spent a fair amount of time making sure that White couldn't play 18.Qe7? Bg4 (I planned 18...Bf5, which is still good for an advantage 19.Qxc7+ (19.Rxd8?? Qxe7 20.Rxh8 where I know Black was better, but I missed that Black is just winning after 20...e4-+; 19.Qxd8? Rxd8 20.Rxd8 Nf7-+ Material is equal, but White's rooks cannot do anything with the open file, and Black will start using his superior control of the center.) 19...Kxc7 20.Rxd8 Rxd8 21.Rxd8 Kxd8 22.Bxc6 Bd3 23.Ng3 Bxc4. It won't be easy to convert this endgame against the two bishops, but Black is clearly in the driver's seat.)

18...Nb8

The best move, using the knight for defense, and freeing up the king to



L-R: Ryan Porter, Stephen Willy.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.

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potentially get of the h1–a8 diagonal. An interesting try is 18...Bg4!? 19.Bxc6+ (or White could force ...Nb8 anyway with 19.b5 Nb8) 19...Qxc6 20.Rxd8 Rxd8 21.Rxd8 Qxg2



Position after 18...Nb8

19.h3

Logical. Stopping Black from playing the freeing move Bg4. The main alternative is 19.b5 when Black has to play 19...Bg4 (I unfortunately planned to play the much weaker 19...Kc8? when Black cannot stop White's knight from getting to d6 after 20.Ng3+- (and White also has an equally strong, but harder to find, line of 20.Bb4 c5 21.Bxc5!! bxc5 22.Nc3+- when Black is totally lost, but it's far from obvious to me.)) And now craziness can ensue. For example: 20.bxc6+ Nxc6 21.Bxc6+ (21.Bd5?! Kb8 22.f3 Bc8 23.c5. Lines like this are why I wasn't planning on playing 19...Bg4, because they seem horrible for Black, but Stockfish evaluates it as about equal.) 21...Kxc6 22.h3 Rxd2 23.Rxd2 Bc8 24.Bxe5 Qxe5 25.Qxa7 Nf5 26.g4 Bb7 27.Qa4+ Kc7 28.Qd7+ Kb8 29.Qxf5=

19...Kc8

I considered Stockfish's slight preference of 19...Be6 but I didn't like being pinned down after 20.b5 and some sample lines from the engine look rather scary for Black: 20...Rxd2 21.Rxd2 Nf7 22.c5 Stockfish slightly prefers Black, but, eeeek!

20.b5 c5

I felt fine about my position here. I've kept lines closed, my king is off the h1–a8 diagonal, and White's queen is currently out of play. Objectively, it's about equal. 20...cxb5 21.Bb4 is equally good, but I didn't want to voluntarily open lines for White's bishops.

21.Bb2 Be6

Equally good is starting with 21...Nf5



(L) Mary Kuhner vs Vihaan Pai during their eighth round game.
Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.

22.Nc3



Position after 22.Nc3

22...Bxc4?

The start of a two-move sequence where my position crumbled. It was important to bring my h6-knight into the game. 22...Rxd2 23.Rxd2 Nf5 24.Nd5 Bxd5 25.Rxd5 (25.Bxd5 Nd4?) 25...Rd8= (I only looked at 25...Nd4?? 26.Bg4+ f5 (26...Kb7 27.Rxd4 exd4 28.Qf3+-) 27.Bxd4+-); 22...Nf5 is similar to 22...Rxd2

23.Nd5!

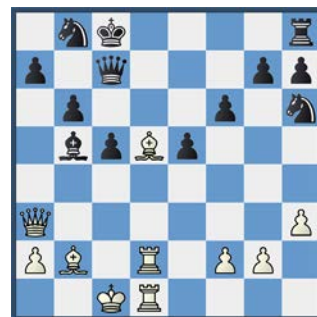
I expected 23.Bd5? Bxd5 24.Nxd5 Qf7= where I correctly evaluated that Black could play around the knight and fight on. However, I misjudged White's best path forward. I figured the fight would revolve around a piece anchored on d5,

and a knight seemed like the best piece to have there. So, I grabbed a second pawn on c4, not just to be greedy, but to weaken this outpost. Instead, it was open lines for rooks and bishops that decided this game.

23...Rxd5?

23...Bxd5 24.Bxd5± I correctly evaluated this as not fun for Black, but I could have fought on 24...Qe7 25.Qb3 Rhe8 26.g4 Rd7

24.Bxd5 Bxb5+-



Position after 24...Bxb5

When I foresaw this position while deciding on 22...Bxc4, I grossly miscalculated it. My intuition was that there are no pawns left to bind me down, there's no knight jumping to d5, the rooks have no immediate entry point, and my bishop and b8 knight are helping to shore

up the light squares. Wow, was I wrong! Part of the issue that the knight on h6 is stuck. Another issue is that there are still other weak light squares that White can exploit.

25.Qb3

Immediately exploiting the light squares. Starting with Be6+ is equally good, but the key is to play Qb3 here or on the next move.

25...Bc6 26.Be6+ Kb7 27.Rd6

Ooof. Okay, that's a good entry point.

27...c4



A Conversation With Chad Fondren

(Playing Like A Rock Star)

Ken Lee

It's not often that you meet someone who is so passionate about Chess and Rock and Roll but Chad Fondren isn't your typical player.

Chad owns and operates two School of Rock franchises (Seattle Downtown and Issaquah) and heads up the Issaquah Highlands Chess Club.

I sat down with Chad to discuss how he manages to blend his two passions and the unique connection between chess and music.

Ken: When did you start playing chess?

Chad: I started when I was five. My dad introduced the game to me and my older brother. Dad was clever and knew how to motivate us.

He offered us \$100 when we could beat him in chess.

When my brother finally beat my dad, my brother decided: "I'm good. I don't need to play anymore."

It took me until I was about six and I finally beat my dad. By then, I had already fallen in love with the game.

I played my first scholastic tournament with my elementary school club when I was ten.

Ken: What was a pivotal point in your chess journey?

Chad: It was in junior high school in Kent, Washington. I made a friend who was so passionate and competitive about chess that it really accelerated my interest through junior high and high school. It

was great to have a friend who would play, analyze games, and just talk about chess on a regular basis.

Ken: What's the strongest memory for you of playing chess at that time?

Chad: In 1992, I was playing in my first USCF tournament at the Yakima Open. By coincidence the tournament was happening when the Fischer-Spassky games were being televised.

It was kind of wild. We would play and then rush to hear updates from the Fischer-Spassky match between rounds.

Ken: Let's talk about your love of music. When did that start for you?

Chad: I was really drawn to music at a very early age. I loved to listen to music on the radio, and by the time I was in fifth grade I started playing the trumpet. That's been my main instrument ever since.

Ken: Did your competitive nature help you in music like it did with chess?

Chad: Yes, now that I think about it, I really liked to push myself in both chess and music. I wasn't the best, but I could always look up to someone and set my goals a little higher.

My high school band had a really competitive jazz program. It was always interesting to me to see where I was compared to my bandmates. I could see and hear where I was weaker and stronger than my peers. It gave me something to shoot for. I guess it's similar to the concept of "playing up" in chess, that is playing against stronger opponents to grow as a player.

Ken: In high school, cliques often form where people want to force you into a box. Did you feel pressure to pick between your chess and your music friends?

Chad: I just never paid that much attention to those labels. I'm sure there were people who were casting their opinions, but I just didn't care.

I just knew what made me happy.

I guess it was things that certain people would consider nerdy like chess, music, D&D, and computers. I just made it a point to pursue all those interests. I just loved them all.

Fortunately, I was able to make friends in each of those social circles.

Ken: How did your chess journey continue to unfold during your university years?

Chad: I attended Central Washington University in Ellensburg and as soon as I got there, I started the chess club. At the same time, I majored in music business with a minor in trumpet performance.

Ken: How do you think chess and music are related?

Chad: I think of both chess and music as beautiful blends of art and science.

Some players lean into more of the science part—I suppose the mathematical part of the game.

But I think what's more interesting to me is the emotional side of both chess and music.

Ken: Can you expand on that idea?

Chad: Music is a very emotional medium. Whether you choose to listen to a certain type of music or play a particular type of music, you are making a choice to place yourself in a specific type of emotional state.

When it comes to chess, I think my favorite emotional part of chess is the opening.

Ken: What do you mean by that?

Chad: I have a passion for openings in general. There is something about the beginning of the game when it's fresh and exciting. The game can go in any direction.

That's the emotional part of chess that I most relate to and the part that keeps me interested and engaged.

Ken: What are some specific differences between playing chess and rock music?

Chad: In rock music, you are supposed to emote and communicate what you're feeling through the music and your instrument. In chess tournaments, you are supposed to adopt a "poker face" where you don't let your opponent know what you are feeling or thinking.

But there are exceptions to that of course.

Ken: When would be a good opportunity to show your emotions in chess?

Chad: I'm thinking of New York and other cities where chess hustlers play with raw emotion.

They purposely try to rattle their opponents with anything and everything they've got including anger, humor, humiliation, and more.

I haven't personally played in those kinds of chess events, but I can see how emotions would be dialed up in intensity.

Ken: Did you continue to play chess after university?

Chad: No, I took quite a long break of almost 25 years. I got busy with my career, marriage and family, and things just kind of took over. The School of Rock Issaquah started up in 2016, and it took an enormous amount of work and time to get it up and running.

Ken: What brought you back to chess?

Chad: Like a lot of people, it was



Chad Fondren

because of the COVID Pandemic and The Queen's Gambit in 2020.

Way back in 1995, I had won the Washington State Class C Championship, and I thought that was going to be the pinnacle of my chess career.

But in 2020, I started playing again and rediscovering a whole new world through Chess.com, YouTube videos, and new chess meet ups at clubs.

It was exciting and it felt great to start competing again.

Ken: When did you start the Issaquah Highlands Chess Club?

Chad: This is when my music and chess worlds accidentally collided. We had completed a School of Rock event at Blakely Hall in Issaquah.

I asked the Issaquah Highlands Council (who manages Blakely Hall) if we could host some chess events in Issaquah.

Ken: When did that happen?

Chad: It was late 2021, and everything came together quite quickly. The folks in charge told us that we could host any chess event we wanted as long as it was open to the public and that we didn't charge any fees.

We've been running chess events once a week ever since. We host tournaments, simulms, lectures, and have built a strong chess community on the East Side.

Ken: What are your future goals in chess?

Chad: I was listening to Ben Johnson on the "Perpetual Chess" Podcast the other day and he wasn't shy about articulating how hard it is to improve in chess as you get older.

That being said, I don't like putting limits on myself or other people. I'd like to think I can continue to learn and work hard and get to a Class A (1800+) or even Expert (2000+) level in chess. In the meantime, I'm having a lot of fun.

Ken: I see you have a chess board here at the School of Rock Downtown Seattle. Do you actively encourage your music students to play?

Chad: Actually, it happens very organically. Somehow just having a chess board in our lobby encourages people to play. I don't routinely promote chess at the School of Rock, nor do I promote my School of Rock program at IHCC. It just

seems to happen naturally, which is great.

Ken: Now from your unique outpost of working in both chess and music, what are some interesting parallels you see between the two?

Chad: I think it boils down to three areas.

In both chess and music there is a strong element of improvisation. With music, you have to know the basics like chords and song structure, but what you do within that can be entirely up to you—particularly in jazz.

In chess, things don't always go as planned so you have to improvise and get creative.

The second thing chess and music have in common is pattern recognition. Your brain just starts seeing and recognizing patterns that help you become a more agile and versatile player.

The last thing is tempo/timing. The concept of tempo or rhythm is central to all music, but we often hear chess players and coaches talk about tempo in a chess game as well. Gaining tempo means achieving a desired outcome in fewer

moves than your opponent, while losing tempo means using more moves than necessary.

Ken: Why do you think so many neurodivergent kids gravitate towards chess and music?

Chad: I'm not an expert on this subject, but I can tell you that at the School of Rock, we've had many neurodivergent kids really blossom at our school. For many, I think it's the aspect of playing with other kids in a group, working toward the common goal of a big rock show at a major Seattle venue, and coming out of the experience more confident than when they started. The music itself also serves as a super effective focal point to channel their attention.

In the case of chess, it's the 64 squares. That's the whole world they need to deal with.

With music, it's a limited space for them to channel their focus as well (12 notes, 88 keys, six strings, etc.). In both cases, the magic happens when they pour all their creativity, focus, and love into that world.

Ken: Check and mate.



Vancouver Open

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Registration: Online at nwchess.com/OnlineRegistration. Pay with Zelle (ID: WashingtonChessFederation@gmail.com, Tag: WA-Chess), SettleKing (Washington Chess Federation), check mailed to address above, or cash at site.

Site: Hampton Inn & Suites, 315 SE Olympia Drive, Vancouver, WA 98684. (360) 891-3000.

HR: \$191 Standard King/Double Queen Room. Booking [link](#). Use code 90C if booking by phone.

Format: A 5-round, USCF rated Swiss in two sections: Lewis Open and Clark U1700. Maximum of 70 players, please register early.

Time Control: Rd. 1: G/60; +10,
Rds. 2-5: 40/120, SD/30; +10.

Prize Fund: \$2,700 (based on 60 paid entries).

Lewis Open: 1st – 3rd: \$400, 325, 250.
1st U2000/U1800: \$150

Clark U1700: 1st – 3rd: \$300, 200, 150.
1st U1600/U1400/U1200: \$140, 1st Unrated: \$105.

Special Prizes (per section): Biggest Upset win: \$25, Best Female Player (by TPR): \$50, Best Senior Player (50+, by TPR): \$50.

Byes: Two half-point byes available. If interested, request before end of round 2.

Entry Fee: \$90 if postmarked or online by 7/18, \$100 by 7/24, \$110 at site. \$45 play-up fee if rated U1700 USCF and playing in Lewis Open. Free entry for GMs, IMs, WGMs, WIMs.

At-site registration: Sat.: 9 - 9:30 AM.

Rounds: Sat. @ 10 AM, 12:30 PM, 6 PM.
Sun. @ 10 AM, 3:30 PM.

Rating: USCF rated. July 2026 USCF rating supplement will be used to determine pairings and prizes. Foreign ratings used for players with no US Chess rating. Higher of US Chess or foreign ratings used at TD discretion.

Memberships: USCF and WCF membership required, other states accepted.

TOURNAMENTS



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May 3 (Sun.)

4-round Swiss. **Time Control:** Game/50 + 10 sec. increment. **Entry fee:** \$25 (+ \$20 day membership for non-SCC). **Prize fund:** sum of \$14/entry. **Prizes:** 1st (35% of prize fund), 2nd (27%), bottom half (by rating) 1st (22%), 2nd (16%). **Check-in:** 9:15-9:45am. **Rounds:** 10am, 12:20, 2:40, 5pm. **Byes:** 1 half-pt., commit at registration. US Chess rated, US Chess membership required. **Venue:** SCC. **Sign up:** <https://nwchess.com/OnlineRegistration/>.

May 24-25 (Sun.-Mon.)

Carol Kleist Memorial Adult Swiss

See below.

May 30 (Sat.)

May Quads

3-round round-robin. 4-player sections by close rating. **Time control:** Game/85 + 10-sec. increment. **Entry fee:** \$15 (+ \$20 day membership for non-SCC). Prepayment required. **Prizes:** winner of each 4-player quad wins free entry to next Quads played within 3 months. **Check-in:** 9:15-9:45am. **Rounds:** 10am, 2 & 6pm. **Byes:** 0 – must play all 3 rounds! **Venue:** TBA. US Chess rated, US Chess membership req'd. **Sign up:** <https://nwchess.com/OnlineRegistration/>.

May 1, 8, 15, *, 29 (Fri.)

May Flowers

One U.S. Chess-rated round per night, 4 rounds per month, at 7:30pm. **Time control:** 40 moves in 90 minutes w/10sec. increment, then sudden death 60 minutes w/10sec. inc. SCC members free, \$5/night others. Play in any or all rounds! **Sign up** at contact@seattlechess.club. **Venue:** Seattle CC, 28 players max. *no game on 5/22 due to WA Open

Coming up:

- **June Quads** – June 13; tentative, 2B confirmed
- **Emerald City Open** – June 27-28; confirmed
- **Seafair Open** – weekend in late July or early Aug.; 2B confirmed

Check our events calendar periodically for confirmed dates.

4th Annual

Carol Kleist Memorial Adult Swiss

May 24-25, 2026 @ WA Open - Redmond Marriott

- ♣ A 4-round Swiss in 2 sections: Botvinnik (1500+) and Korchnoi (U1500); may be merged if small.
- ♣ **Time control:** Game/120 + 30-second increment.
- ♣ **Rounds:** Sunday & Monday 5/24-25, 11am & 4:30pm both days.
- ♣ **Entry fee:** Online by Saturday 5/23 at 5pm – \$40 SCC members, \$50 others. Onsite add \$10. EF waived for unrated players who purchase memberships. US Chess and WCF/OCF/ICA memberships required.
- ♣ **Register** at <https://nwchess.com/OnlineRegistration/>
- ♣ **Registration:** Sunday 5/25 @ 10-10:30 AM (unless starting with a half-point bye).
- ♣ **Guaranteed prize fund: \$1,000.**
 - Botvinnik: 1st \$240, 2nd \$150, 3rd \$120, 1st U1650 \$80.
 - Korchnoi: 1st \$120, 2nd \$100, 3rd \$80, 1st U1300 \$60, 1st Unrated \$50.
- ♣ 1 half-point bye available.

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Sunday: 10am & 2pm.
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5+3 BLITZ TOURNAMENT: Sat. 9:00 pm, register on site by 8:50 pm. \$10 EF. 80% prize payout!

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Tournament Organizer: **Jim Nelson** (CCC President) - jwnelson.nelson1@gmail.com

You can visit corvallischess.org for registration link and information.

