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SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/LENNART OOTES

Let's Talk About Chess

"I am a chess commentator. That is a sentence I write with pride."

BY MAURICE ASHLEY
Grandmaster

I am a chess commentator. That is a sentence I write with pride.

For more than twenty years, I have been blessed with a front row seat watching the game's greatest players spend hour after hour in pitched battles trying to rip each other to shreds. I was there, in 1994, in a small booth overlooking the stage inside the Kremlin in Moscow during the epic Intel World Chess Grand Prix tournament. It was the first time a major chess event had ever been held inside that grand complex, and I was bellowing so loudly from the excitement of the games that Klara Kasparova, the then World Champion's mother, switched her headphones from the Russian channel to the English one to hear what all the fuss was about. A year later, I partnered with the legendary Danny King as Garry Kasparov and Viswanathan Anand duked it out for the title inside a (mostly) sound-proof booth, a match that began on September 11 on the 107th floor of the South Tower of the World Trade Center. In 1997, I helped to call the 2nd Man vs. Machine match when IBM's super computer Deep Blue dealt a digital blow of revenge against Kasparov, who had defeated it the year before, sending a collective shiver down the spines of humans everywhere as the cold truth stared us in the face that the silicon entities had irrevocably surpassed us in our precious pastime, if not (yet) in actual intelligence.

Jump ahead two decades and now I travel the world calling the games of a new generation of chess giants. When I witness Magnus Carlsen time and again cut through a field of elite warriors in elaborately staged Blitz competitions, I often feel like an over-enthused fan getting paid to whoop and holler in a stadium while watching Michael, Kobe, or Lebron bully their way through the opposition in the NBA Finals. I get to work alongside a team of Hall of Fame talents (Yasser Seirawan, Jennifer Shahade, Alejandro Ramirez, Cristian Chirila), as we argue over complicated ideas in front of a live worldwide audience eagerly following every move of their favorite players.

Why is a commentator important? Well, it's the commentator's task to pull back the curtain to reveal the hidden excitement of chess games full of dramatic twists and turns, hidden subplots, psychological intrigue, intense mood swings, and moments of pure devastation. While we may use engines as partners as they spit out lines of often brilliant analysis, it is up to the human expert to tell the tale behind the reams of code, to artfully infuse dry variations with compelling story lines. Commentators bring their contrasting opinions and personalities into the mix all the while keeping track of multiple games that build in tension toward the almost inevitable pulse-racing moments of acute time pressure. In the post-game interviews, commentators gently cajole players who have just stumbled out of the heat of battle to reveal something of their innermost thoughts and feelings they had during a game they may have just lost. We ride the waves of emotions as we recall how we feel when we play, and we empathize with the game's geniuses as they suffer over move after move, round after round, day in, day out, till there is only one champion left standing.

As someone who lives to promote our royal game and who wishes to see it become more mainstream, I relish my role as a part of the evolution of broadcasting chess as sports entertainment. I fully appreciate that we are on the front lines of progress and potential growth, looking to gain the level of respect many other sports have already attained. While it's certainly easier to call a physical activity where the athletes swiftly dart about the field or court, we chess commentators embrace the challenge of making thirty-two wooden pieces come alive on a flat board of sixty-four squares.

I am a chess commentator. I write those words with a satisfied smile.

Above, Legendary World Champion Garry Kasparov interviewed by Grandmaster Maurice Ashley during Round 8 of the 2015 Sinquefield Cup.

PHOTOS SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/AUSTIN FULLER

The Big 3: Caruana, Nakamura, So

BY ROBERT HESS
Grandmaster

When Americans hear of a "Big Three," nostalgia might take their minds to competitors in the automotive industry or the early television networks. Fans of the runaway NBC television hit *This is Us* may shed uncontrollable tears when hearing the phrase.

Today's American chess fans know Grandmasters Fabiano Caruana, Hikaru Nakamura, and Wesley So as the "Big Three" representing the United States.

Saint Louis and the Saint Louis Chess Club (STLCC) have played an integral role in raising the standards of American chess. The first of ten straight U.S. and U.S. Women's Championships held in Saint Louis were played in 2009, with Nakamura, then a newly-minted 2700 FIDE, reigning supreme for his second title.

Since that championship, Nakamura has tacked on two more and become a mainstay in the world top ten, reaching his peak of world number two in October of 2015. He scored an impressive international victory in Wijk aan Zee (2011) and three-peats at the Zurich Chess Challenge and the Gibraltar Chess Festival (2015–17). Nakamura's strong play in the 2016 Grand Prix qualified him for the Candidates' Tournament, whose winner earns the right to face the World Champion. His quest for additional U.S. Championships has been halted by Caruana and So, both of whom are also firmly entrenched among the world's elite players.

Caruana, a dual citizen who switched to the Italian federation in 2005 before returning to compete under the American flag in 2015, acknowledged that the STLCC played a vital role in his decision to depart Europe. A historic seven straight wins during his domination at the 2014 Sinquefield Cup, arguably the greatest performance ever recorded, undoubtedly influenced him to establish residence in Saint Louis. As a result of that tournament, Caruana became the third highest rated player in history. In 2018, Caruana will challenge Magnus Carlsen for the World Champion title.

So, born and raised in the Philippines, initially came to the U.S. to join the chess program at Webster University. After leaving school to make the game his profession, So's rating has soared. Opportunities in Saint Louis have aided So in his journey to world number two and qualification for the 2018 Candidates' Tournament. The 2016 Sinquefield Cup was his first super-tournament victory and propelled him to the top of the 2016 Grand Chess Tour. He followed up that breakthrough success by winning the 2017 U.S. Chess Championship.

The trio have been fierce competitors, but together formed a potent one-two-three punch at the 2016 World Chess Olympiad. The United States team, supported by the STLCC, won gold in Baku for the first time in four decades.

The Saint Louis Chess Club, founded by generous benefactors Dr. Jeanne and Rex Sinquefield, has been the catalyst for chess development in the United States. There are numerous events held every year for living legends and blossoming prodigies alike, including the Champions Showdown, quarterly norm tournaments, and the U.S. Junior and Girls' Junior Championships. Inspired by Caruana, Nakamura, and So, the next generation of American chess talent has more opportunities than any of its predecessors, all thanks to the Saint Louis Chess Club.

The Pro Chess League Returns

BY DENES BOROS
Grandmaster

The inaugural Pro Chess League season ended with a resounding victory by the Saint Louis Arch Bishops last year. The Pro Chess League, originally the U.S. Chess League, used to be an online chess tournament where American chess teams, from different states and cities, competed for first place. Chess.com, the founder of the Pro Chess League, decided to innovate and expand on this league by inviting players from other cities, countries and continents. The first event was a great success, as teams from all over the world joined to play. There were contestants from cities like Paris, London, New York, and of course, the Chess Capital of the United States: Saint Louis.

Surprisingly, the teams from London and Paris didn't manage to get into the finals. Instead, the final was played between a Norwegian team, the Norway Gnomes, led by none other than reigning World Champion Magnus Carlsen. The Norway Gnomes faced the Saint Louis Arch Bishops in a tough fight. The Saint Louis Arch Bishops, led by Saint Louis resident and U.S. Champion Wesley So, triumphed–helping the Saint Louis Chess Club team become the first champions of the Pro Chess League.

This year, the Pro Chess League returns with some new rules and new faces. The time control did not change; players will still get 15 minutes for the whole game, with an extra two-second increment for every move. Matches between two teams take roughly two hours, with 16 total games played. There are some changes though. Every team will post their four-player lineup prior to the start of the match. This change means that there will be no substitutions allowed during game play, so players can't just sit in for one game; they will have to play all four rounds.

After the rules change and league surprises were announced, the league draft was in full swing. The first surprise was Fabiano Caruana's departure from the Montreal Chessbrahs, as he now joins the ranks of the Saint Louis Arch Bishops. In fact, that is not the only recruitment. Mike Kummer, the team manager of the Arch Bishops, also enlisted Annie Wang, the reigning World Under 16 Youth Champion.

The Saint Louis team is not the only one gearing up for a new and even more combative season: The Montclair Sopranos are now joined by Alex Lenderman, and by Africa's first ever Elite grand master, Amin Bassem, who just recently crossed the magical rating of 2700. The league grew so much that many more countries joined the action. China and India both have a team representing them at the Pro Chess League this year with players like former World Champion Viswanathan Anand in their ranks. The Montreal Chessbrahs, shocked by the loss of their team leader Caruana, did not despair and recruited Hou Yifan, the strongest female player of recent years.

SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/AUSTIN FULLER

The 2018 season began on January 18th, and ends in an exciting, public final in San Francisco hosted by Chess.com and Twitch. The world's best chess players will battle it out at the Folsom Street Foundry for the first ever chess eSport event April 7–8, 2018. The teams battling it out this year are the Armenia Eagles, Ljubujana Turtles, Saint Louis Arch Bishops, and Chengdu Pandas.

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Behind the Scenes –and Cameras–of Grand Chess Tour

BY ERIC MOUSEL
Broadcast Editor

"This game will be over in two moves."

"...and how long will that take?"

"It could be 20 seconds. It could be two hours."

Let's get one thing clear–20 seconds is a lifetime when it comes to live television. It's the real world equivalent of deciding what to wear on a first date, or which of 50 toppings to smother on your Froyo. These things take time.

[Ed. Note: I should point out that none of the technical staff, "TV People," at the Saint Louis Chess Club are what you'd call "chess people." But that doesn't matter in the same way a chef doesn't need to know the Sicilian open to make Hikaru Nakamura spaghetti and meatballs.]

So, how do you combine a game notorious for long, protracted mental battles with the frantic, fast-paced format of sports broadcasting?

First, you're going to need a Yasser, a Maurice, and a Jennifer. Yasser Seirawan and Maurice Ashley are both Grandmasters and Jennifer Shahade is a chess champion and author. This dynamic trio make up the Grand Chess Tour commentary and analysis team that you see on-air. Our analysts are the tip of the spear, the cherry on top, whatever sits aloft the things you like!

Energetic and exciting commentary is the backbone of our show and all of our commentators produce both in enormous sums. Want proof? Even I, a 'TV Person', can understand what they're talking about (sometimes). Besides, imagine if we instead hired Ben Stein. You'd be in cryogenic sleep halfway to Mars by now.

Second, you need an exceptionally good team for broadcast. And, as you might've guessed, that's not an easy thing to come up with on a whim (I've yet to see a billboard for "Exceptionally Good Broadcast Team" as I was cruising down I-70). We have...

Producers, who make sure everyone is doing their jobs and on time;

Directors, who call all the shots and direct the on-air talent through their ear pieces;

Camera and sound crew who capture all the sights and sounds to bring the action to life;

IT, post-production, social media, and the broadcast editor who produce all the graphics for every show.

All come together to produce the best chess show on Earth (and probably Mars, too).

Few of us work for the same company and many are freelancers, but we're all family, which makes each major tournament we cover feel like a homecoming. Similar to when a bunch of superheroes join together to fight a supreme evil, but with less violence, and it's catered.

Third, and last, we need you–the fans. [What, did you think we'd forget to include you in this back-patting session?] Chess is a world sport and so we are an international production, dedicated to giving you the best coverage possible. And when I say dedicated I mean "walking into the studio at 5 a.m. wearing yoga pants and clutching an espresso" dedicated.

If you've been enjoying from afar, think about making a trip here. We'd love to see you in person. In 2016, our broadcasts of the Grand Chess Tour tournaments alone garnered millions of viewers around the world. Not bad for a group of nomads coming together in Saint Louis to produce one of the most unique broadcasts in all of sports.

Originally published on St. Louis Public Radio, December 2016

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❶ Commentators WGM Jennifer Shahade and GM Yasser Seirawan seen from behind the camera.

❷ GM Maurice Ashley analyzes a game during live commentary.

❸ Legendary World Champion Garry Kasparov joins the commentary team to interview former World Champion Viswanathan Anand.

❹ Inside the production van.

❺ GM Cristian Chirila filming the show opening.

4

5

PHOTOS SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/AUSTIN FULLER

2017 Saint Louis Arch Bishops, from left to right: NM Nicholas Rosenthal, GM Wesley So, GM Yaroslav Zherebukh, GM Dariusz Świercz, GM Varuzhan Akobian, GM Francesco Rambaldi, GM Cemil Can Ali Marandi, GM Ben Finegold, and International Arbiter Mike Kummer.

Key Games Played in Saint Louis

BY TATEV ABRAHAMYAN
Woman Grandmaster

Countless memorable games have unfolded at the Saint Louis Chess Club, many of which have become integral parts of modern chess history. From junior players to Magnus Carlsen, chess players have essayed their best moves right here at the U.S. Chess Capital. Major tournaments hosted in Saint Louis include the U.S. Junior and U.S. Girls' Junior Championship, the U.S. and U.S. Women's Championships, and the Sinquefield Cup. Some players have experienced the biggest heartbreaks of their careers during those events, while other have set records and reached career milestones.

In 2009, Anna Zatonskih scored an incredible 8.5/9 to clinch the title of the U.S. Women's Champion for the second year in a row. She secured the title with one round to spare with a win over future US Women's Champion Sabina Foisor with an idea reminiscent of the famous endgame between Topalov and Shirov from 1998.

Queen's Gambit Declined [D35]
WGM Sabina Foisor (2320)
IM Anna Zatonskih(2462)
USA-ch (Women) Saint Louis (8), 12.10.2009

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Be7 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Bf4 Nf6 6.Qc2 c5 7.e3 cxd4 8.exd4 Nc6

After several transpositions we reach a symmetrical pawn structure.

9.Bb5 Qb6 10.Nge2 0–0 11.Bxc6 Qxc6 12.0–0 Be6 13.Rac1 Rac8 14.f3 Qd7 15.g4

This move is unnecessary and the beginning of White's problems.

15. … b5 16.a3 Ne8 17.Qb3 a6 18.Bg3 Rc4 19.Rcd1 f6 20.Rfe1 Bf7 21.Nf4 Nc7 22.Qc2 b4 23.axb4 Bxb4 24.Qf5 Qxf5 25.gxf5 Nb5 26.Nfe2 Nxc3 27.bxc3 Bxc3 28.Nxc3 Rxc3

Black is now up a pawn in an opposite-colored bishop ending.

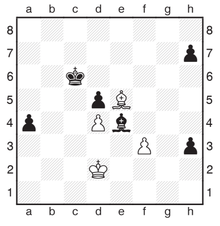
29.Kf2 Rfc8 30.Re3 Rxe3 31.Kxe3 Rc3+ 32.Rd3 Rxd3+ 33.Kxd3

The exchange of the rooks should favor White, as these endgames give the side with less material great drawing chances. However, White has pawn weaknesses that Black's bishop can exploit.

33. … Bh5 34.Ke3 a5 35.Bd6 Kf7 36.Kf4 Ke8 37.Ba3 a4 38.Ke3 Kd7 39.h3 Kd8 40.Bf8 Ke8 41.Bc5

If 41.Bxg7?? a3 42.Bxf6 a2 and the pawn will promote.

41. … Kf7 42.h4 Kg8 43.Kf4 Be8 44.Ba3 Bb5 45.Ke3 Kf7 46.Bb4 Bc4 47.Kd2 Bf1 48.Ke3 Bh3 49.Kf4 Ke8 50.Ba3 Kd7 51.Bf8 Kc6 52.Ke3 Bxf5 53.Kd2 g5 54.Be7 gxh4 55.Bxf6 h3 56.Be5 Be4!!



A brilliant way to end the game! Black will have three passed pawns, and White can't stop them all.

0–1

In a recent interview, Fabiano Caruana called his win over Levon Aronian at the 2014 Sinquefield Cup one of his best games ever. It was the fourth in his amazing series of seven consecutive wins at the event.

RUY LOPEZ (C77)
Fabiano Caruana (2801)
Levon Aronian (2805)
Sinquefield Cup 2nd
Saint Louis (4), 30.08.2014

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0–0 Be7 6.d3 b5 7.Bb3 0–0 8.Nc3 d6 9.a3 Na5 10.Ba2 Be6 11.Bxe6 fxe6 12.b4 Nc6 13.Bd2 d5 14.Re1 Qd6 15.Na2

Caruana spots the outpost on c5 and decides to bring his knight there.

15. … Nd7 16.Qe2 d4 17.Reb1 Nb6 18.Nc1 Na4 19.Nb3 Rf7 20.Rc1 Rd8 21.Ng5 Rf6?!

21…Bxg5 22.Bxg5 Rdf8 23.Rf1 Nc3 was a better option for Black.

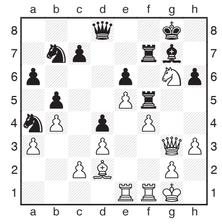
22.Qh5 h6 23.Nf3 Rdf8 24.Rf1

Regrouping his pieces and defending the f2 pawn.

24. … R8f7 25.Rae1 Bf8 26.h3 g6 27.Qh4 Qe7 28.Qg3 Bg7 29.Na5 Nxa5 30.Nxe5!

The most accurate move. 30.bxa5 Rxf3 31.gxf3 Kh7 32.Kh2 Rf6 followed by … Qf7 would give Black counterplay.

30. … Nb7 31.Nxg6 Qd8 32.e5 Rf5 33.f4



Black is up a piece, but all of his pieces are useless, scattered all over the board.

33. … c5 34.Nh4 Rh5 35.Nf3 Kh7 36.Qg4 Rhf5 37.Nh4 Kh8

White wins the material back and converts his advantage.

38.Nxf5 Rxf5 39.Qg6 Qe7 40.g4 Rf8 41.f5 Qe8 42.Qxe8 Rxe8 43.f6 Bf8 44.f7 Re7 45.Rf6 Nb6 46.Bxh6 Nd7 47.Ref1 cxb4 48.axb4 Bxh6 49.Rxh6+ Kg7 50.Rh5

1–0

Alexander Onischuk defeated Jeffery Xiong in a must-win final round game at the 2017 U.S. Championship, tying for first place with Wesley So and forcing the first playoff since 2014. So defeated Onischuk in the first game of their rapid match and drew the second, making him the 2017 U.S. Champion.

MIKENAS ATTACK (A18)
Wesley So (2822)
Alexander Onischuk (2667)
USA-ch playoff Saint Louis (1), 10.04.2017

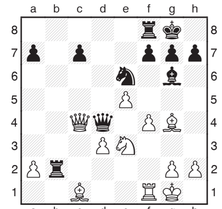
1.c4 e6 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.e4 d5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.e5 Ne4 6.Nf3 Bf5 7.Be2 Be7

The players enter a sharp variation. Wesley later tried the same line with the Black pieces against Caruana and lost. (See Caruana-So, Paris 2017, for the game.)

SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/AUSTIN FULLER

IM Nazi Paikidze vs. WGM Tatev Abrahamyan during Round 10 of the 2017 U.S. Women's Chess Championship.

8.0–0 0–0 9.Qb3 Nc6 10.Nxd5 Bc5 11.Ne3 Bg6 12.Qxb7 Nd4 13.Nxd4 Bxd4 14.d3 Nc5 15.Qb5 Rb8 16.Qc4 Ne6 17.f4 Bxb2 18.Rb1 Qd4 19.Rxb2 Rxb2 20.Bg4



This is the critical moment.

20. … Rb4??

Simply retreating with 20…Qb6 and keeping the knight pinned would have kept the game going. Play might have continued 21.Bxb2 (21.f5? Rb4 22.Qc2 Rxg4) 21. … Qxe3+ 22.Kh1 Bxd3 23.Qc3 Rb8.

21.Qxd4 Rxd4 22.f5
Now White will win a piece and the game.

22. … Nf4 23.Nc2 Ra4 24.Bxf4 h5 25.Bd1 Bh7 26.Ne3 Rxa2 27.e6 fxe6 28.Bb3 Re2 29.fxe6 Re8 30.e7+ Kh8 31.Bg5

1–0

Going into the last round of the 2017 U.S. Junior Championship, Awonder Liang was half a point behind the tournament leader, Kayden Troff. The tables were turned when Kayden found himself outprepared and collapsed, allowing Awonder to surpass him with a win. The young prodigy did not miss his opportunity to squeeze his way to victory, winning the U.S. Juniors and qualifying to 2018 US Championship.

RUY LOPEZ (C66)
Awonder Liang (2536)
Michael William Brown (2508)
USA-ch U20 Saint Louis (9), 16.07.2017

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 Nf6 4.d3 d6 5.0–0 Bd7 6.Re1 g6 7.c3 Bg7 8.d4 0–0 9.Ba4 h6 10.Nbd2 Re8 11.h3 a5 12.Qb3 Qc8 13.Qd1

White's last two moves are a sign that he is not quite sure how to handle this position.

13. … Nb8 14.Bc2 Bc6 15.Bd3 b6 16.Qc2 Na6 17.a3 Qb7 18.b3 Nh5 19.Bb2 Nf4 20.Bf1 Bd7

The position is closed, so the players are shuffling their pieces around until one side finds a break.

21.b4 Nb8?

21…axb4 22.axb4 b5 would give Black more room.

22.b5!

Grabbing more space on the queenside. Now the knight on b8 is stuck.

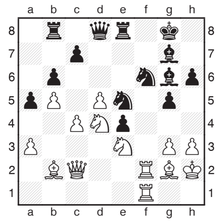
22. … Be6 23.Kh2 Qc8 24.Ng1 g5 25.g3 Ng6 26.Nc4 f5

With the closing of the queenside, attention shifts to the kingside.

27.exf5 Bxf5 28.Qd2 Nd7 29.Bg2 Rb8 30.Re2 Be6 31.Ne3 Nf6 32.Qc2!

Exploiting the weaknesses of the light squares.

32. … Bf7 33.Rae1 e4 34.f3 d5 35.fxe4 dxe4 36.Rf1 Nf8 37.c4 Bg6 38.Ref2 Qd8 39.d5 N8d7 40.Ne2 Ne5 41.Nd4



The knight will land on either e6 or f5, devastating the Black king.

41. … Nh5 42.Ndf5 Nf3+ 43.Bxf3 exf3 44.Rxf3 Kh7 45.g4 Bxb2 46.gxh5 Be5+ 47.Kh1 Bxh5 48.Ne7+ Kg7 49.Nc6 Qd7 50.Nf5+ Kh8 51.Re3 Bf6 52.Nxb8 Rxb8 53.Re6 Rf8 54.Ng3

1–0

With this dominating victory in round 7, Akshita Gorti extended her lead in the 2017 U.S. Girls' Junior Championship to 1.5 points. She convincingly won the tournament with a round to spare and qualified for the 2018 U.S. Women's Championship.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E70)
Akshita Gorti (2232)
Agata Bykovtsev (2045)
USA-ch U20 Girls Saint Louis (7), 14.07.2017

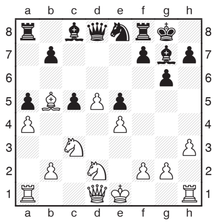
1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.h3 0–0 6.Be3 e5 7.d5 a5 8.c5 Na6 9.cxd6 cxd6 10.Nf3 Bd7

10. … Nd7 is more accurate. Black needs a knight on c5.

11.Nd2 Nc5 12.Bxc5!

Akshita shows great positional understanding in giving up her important bishop to weaken Black's pawn structure.

12. … dxc5 13.a4 Ne8 14.Bb5 Bc8



15.Bxe8!

Giving up the other bishop to ensure the knight doesn't land on d6. Now both of Black's bishops are useless while the White knights will dominate the board.

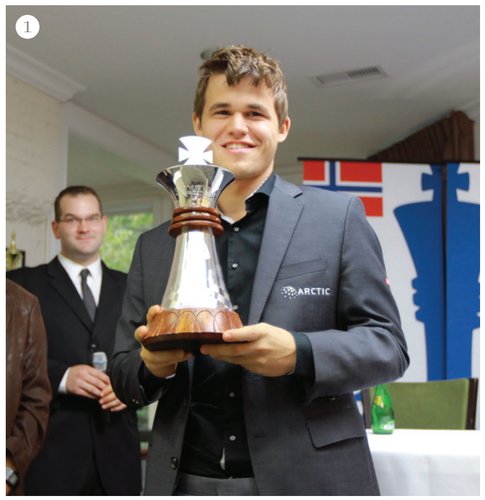
15. … Rxe8 16.0–0 f5 17.Nc4 f4 18.d6 Be6 19.Nd5 Qg5 20.Ra3

Defending the h3 pawn while positioning the rook to attack the black pawns.

20. … Rf8 21.Ndb6 Rad8 22.Kh1 Rf7 23.f3 Bf8 24.Rd3 Qh5 25.Qd2 Bg7 26.b3 g5 27.Kg1 Qg6 28.Qxa5
The pawns fall, one by one.

28. … Rdf8 29.d7 Rd8 30.Qxc5 Bxc4 31.Nxc4 Bf8 32.Qc7 Qf6 33.Nxe5 Rg7 34.Rfd1 h5 35.Rd5 g4 36.hxg4 h4 37.g5 Qxg5 38.Ng4 Qe7 39.Nh6+ Kh7 40.Nf5 Rxg2+ 41.Kxg2 Qg5+ 42.Kh2 h3 43.Rg1 Qf6 44.e5 Qxf5 45.Qxd8 Qc2+ 46.Kh1 Qf2 47.Qh4+ Qxh4 48.d8Q Qf2 49.Rd7+

1–0



SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/SPECTRUM STUDIOS

PHOTO © HARRY BENSON

SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB

The Saint Louis Chess Club has been a vital part of its community and the chess world at large since its inception in 2008. From local events for children to world class events, the Chess Club has welcomed players of all levels. Here are some photos from a few of those memorable events.

❶ Magnus Carlsen wins the 2013 Sinquefield Cup.

❷ Fabiano Caruana wins the 2014 Sinquefield Cup after a record-setting 7 game streak.

❸ Rex Sinquefield and Chess Campus staff partake in a Human Chess Match, 2010.

❹ Garry Kasparov joins Jennifer Shahade and Yasser Seirawan for commentary, 2015.

❺ The "World" team wins the Match of the Millennials, 2014.

❻ 2015 U.S. and U.S. Women's Chess Champions: Hikaru Nakamura and Irina Krush.

❼ Garry Kasparov returns to competitive chess at the 2017 Saint Louis Rapid & Blitz Tournament.

MAJOR TOURNAMENT MOMENTS

SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/LENNART OOTES

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SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/AUSTIN FULLER

SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/LENNART OOTES

SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/SPECTRUM STUDIOS

Magnus Carlsen, 2013

"I'd like to thank Rex and Jeanne again, and if everything goes well, I'll be back."

SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/AUSTIN FULLER

Wesley So, 2016

"I can't really describe how I feel. It's like a dream. This is definitely my biggest win ever so far."

PHOTO © HARRY BENSON

Fabiano Caruana, 2014

"In terms of this tournament, it's probably one of the best I've ever played."

SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/LENNART OOTES

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, 2017

"Saint Louis is more than the Sinquefield Cup. There is so much going on. The Club is expanding and the Hall of Fame… I think it goes to show their dedication to bring chess to the highest levels."

Levon Aronian, 2015

"I want to say that in the history of chess, I don't know anybody who sponsors chess with so much love and with the feeling that they don't really want anything back from chess. So I want to thank Jeanne and Rex Sinquefield for their support, and I want to say that for me, every time I come here, and I see them, I'm very happy. I know that our game is respected and loved, and will flourish as long as their work continues."

SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB/AUSTIN FULLER

Tournament Winners

2009–2017

2009

U.S. Championship
Hikaru Nakamura

U.S. Women's Championship
Anna Zatonskih

2010

U.S. Championship
Gata Kamsky

U.S. Women's Championship
Irina Krush

U.S. Junior Championship
Sam Shankland

2011

U.S. Championship
Gata Kamsky

U.S. Women's Championship
Anna Zatonskih

U.S. Junior Championship
Gregory Young

Kings vs. Queens
Hikaru Nakamura
Ben Finegold
Kevin Cao
Jacek Stopa
Marc Arnold

Saint Louis International Match
Hikaru Nakamura
Ray Robson

2012

U.S. Championship
Hikaru Nakamura

U.S. Women's Championship
Irina Krush

U.S. Junior Championship
Marc Arnold

Clash of the Kings
Anatoly Karpov

2013

U.S. Championship
Gata Kamsky

U.S. Women's Championship
Irina Krush

U.S. Junior Championship
Daniel Naroditsky

Sinquefield Cup
Magnus Carlsen

2014

U.S. Championship
Gata Kamsky

U.S. Women's Championship
Irina Krush

U.S. Junior Championship
Kayden Troff

Sinquefield Cup
Fabiano Caruana

Showdown in Saint Louis
Hikaru Nakamura

2015

U.S. Championship
Hikaru Nakamura

U.S. Women's Championship
Irina Krush

U.S. Junior Championship
Akshat Chandra

Sinquefield Cup
Levon Aronian

Battle of the Legends
Garry Kasparov

Showdown in Saint Louis
Fabiano Caruana
Hou Yifan

2016

U.S. Championship
Fabiano Caruana

U.S. Women's Championship
Nazi Paikidze

U.S. Junior Championship
Jeffery Xiong

Sinquefield Cup
Wesley So

Champions Showdown
Viswanathan Anand

2017

U.S. Championship
Wesley So

U.S. Women's Championship
Sabina Foisor

U.S. Junior Championship
Awonder Liang

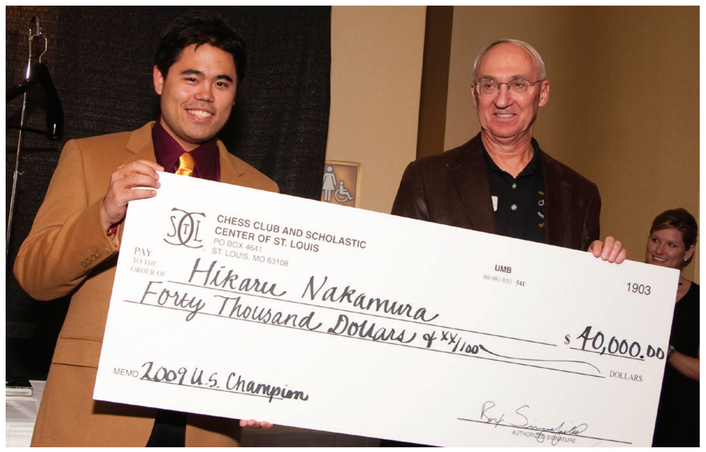
U.S. Girls' Junior Championship
Akshita Gorti

Match of the Millennials
Haik Martirosyan
Andrey Esipenko
Aleksey Sarana
Anton Smirnov
Aryan Chopra
Praggnanandhaa Ramesh Babu
Nodirbek Abdusattarov
Bibisara Assaubayeva
Nurgul Salimova

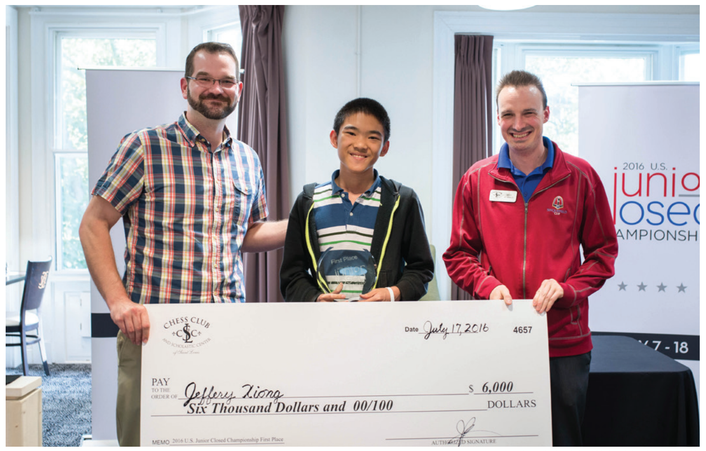
Sinquefield Cup
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

Saint Louis Rapid & Blitz
Levon Aronian

Champions Showdown
Hikaru Nakamura
Fabiano Caruana
Wesley So
Magnus Carlsen



SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB



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SLU Adds Chess Team to Elite Sports Roster

COURTESY OF STEVE DOLAN

BY ALEJANDRO RAMIREZ
Grandmaster,
Coach of the Saint Louis
University Chess Team

Saint Louis University (SLU) has added another sport to its elite roster: chess. Coached by Grandmaster (GM) Alejandro Ramirez, the Billikens made their first major appearance in a collegiate team tournament by taking second place in the 2016 Pan-American Intercollegiate Chess Championship.

60 teams participated in the competition, including elite universities such as Princeton, Columbia and Carnegie Mellon. The Saint Louis region had a strong representation, including Saint Louis University, Washington University, Lindenwood University and the overall winners, Webster University, who are coached by GM Susan Polgar.

The inaugural SLU team was comprised of the following players:

GM Dariusz Swiercz
Sophomore, Poland, Business

GM Yaro Zherebukh
Grad, USA, Applied Financial Economics

GM Francesco Rambaldi
Freshman, Italy, Economics

IM Cemil Can Ali Marandi
Freshman, Turkey, Computer Science

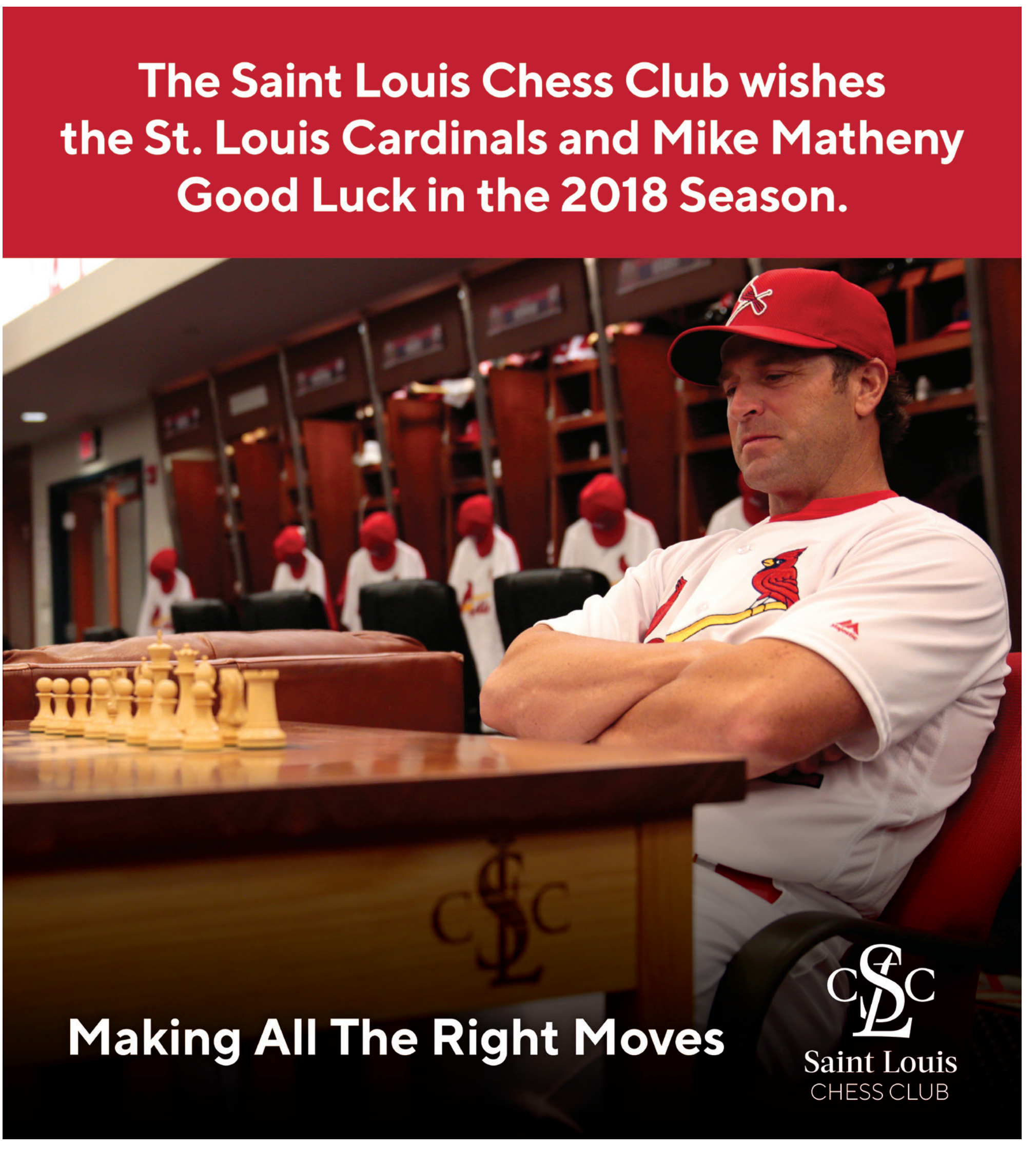
Nozima Aripova
Junior, Uzbekistan, Biology

Improvement in the SLU squad has been apparent based on the good results that they have had since this tournament. SLU chess team members have have represented the Billikens in competitions worldwide. Dariusz participated in the 2016 Chess Olympiad in the Polish squad, and had a strong showing in the Aeroflot Open in Moscow. Yaro scored an excellent 50 percent in the 2017 U.S. Championship and hopes to improve that score in the 2018 edition. Cemil Can has played in numerous events, elevating his ranking from International Master to Grandmaster.

The SLU team strengthened its ranks by recruiting IM Dorsa Derakhshani and GM Alexander Ipatov in the Fall of 2017.

Saint Louis has attracted some of the brightest chess minds in the world. With Webster University and SLU, the two highest rated chess teams are now in this city. The Webster team, which was brought here from Texas Tech by Susan Polgar in 2012, has been amazingly successful, winning all of the Final Fours that it has participated in. One of their top players, GM Ray Robson, was part of the 2016 American Olympiad team that took the gold medal in Azerbaijan.

The move from Texas Tech to Webster was controversial, as Polgar uprooted her students to the suburban college. "The program grew rapidly, and Texas Tech wasn't ready to grow with the speed of the program," said the coach, who founded the Susan Polgar Institute for Chess Excellence, known as SPICE, in 2007. "Saint Louis today is the center of chess in America. It just seemed like a perfect fit."

Texas Tech has since hired former U.S. Champion and 2018 U.S. Chess Hall of Fame Inductee Alexander Onischuk to be their new coach, and their program is also rapidly progressing. As collegiate chess competition gets tighter and tighter, the Gorlocks and Billikens will be looking to recruit and strengthen their ranks with grandmasters from around the globe.

GM Alejandro Ramirez coaching at SLU.