

NorCal Teams and Individuals Shine at the 2013 SuperNationals

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The largest rated tournament in the history of chess took place in Nashville, Tennessee from April 5 through April 7. Super Nationals V drew 5335 young players from Kindergarten through 12th grade. The Super Nationals, in a sense, are a scholastic chess Olympics as they are held every fourth year. During the in between years each school level has its own national competition—Elementary School, Junior High School and High School.

Competition at any of these nationals is an endurance event with seven games in three days having two hour time control with a time delay of 5 seconds. This could mean a game as long as 4 hours and 10 minutes. Upsets are quite common and some of Northern California top players succumbed to the pressure. Despite the set back for some, the final results are still impressive.

Gomes Elementary School from Fremont became the newest NorCal team to claim a national title. Only those teams competing in the championship division at the nationals, not any sub-divisions, can claim a national title. Up until 2009 only Bellarmine Preparatory High School (1987) of San Jose and Hopkins Junior High School (1996) of Fremont had won a Spring National team title. In 2009, Mission San Jose of Fremont broke the draught by winning the Elementary Championship. Other NorCal schools followed suit -- Weibel Elementary School of Fremont and Regnart Elementary School and Kennedy Middle School of Cupertino – as Mission San Jose continues to win titles.

I have a special place in my heart for Gomes. This was the second public school I ever taught chess at. My younger boys went off to college and I had some time on my hands. The principal there had been my oldest son's GATE teacher at Mission San Jose Elementary School and I accepted the parents' and his request for me to teach at Gomes. Gomes won their first CalChess State Championship in 2004 defeating my Weibel players. I can't say I was overly thrilled, just very happy. I left Gomes when I left Success Chess in 2005. Over the years a few of the top Gomes players have joined the Weibel program. Joanna Liu (1847), Girl's National Champion, who helped lead the Gomes Team to victory in the K-5 Championships this year, attended Weibel for three and a half years before transferring to Gomes. Another player on the K-5 Gmes cHampionship Team, William Sartorio (1358), only in second grade, still studies with us at Weibel. His personal coach is FM Bela Evans, President of Success Chess. I invited Joanna and William along with Ganesh Murugappan (1761) and Jason Zhang (1497), in third grade, to share our team room gratis. Our coach, Demetrius Goins, was happy to analyze the games of the Gomes players during the tournament.

For a while it appeared that Gomes would not have a team at the Nationals due to an expected emergency that arose in the Liu family. The Weibel and the Gomes parents went looking for ways to get Joanna there. Thankfully, her father was able to return from China in time to make her flight. At the end of the sixth round Gomes was tied with four other schools for first place. In the seventh round Gomes finished with 3.5 points out of four and found itself alone in the winners box by half a point. So while none of my Weibel or Horner teams brought home a national banner this year, I can live vicariously through the amazing success of the Gomes team. Kudos!

Mission San Jose proved once again its prowess not only on our state level but on the national scene as well. They came home with their third National Championship in four years. They won the K-6 Championships. In round six they were in second place and they pulled off their usual magic of finishing well in the last round. They moved into first place a half point ahead of a team from Virginia and a full point ahead of New York's IS 318. IS 318 has been the subject of much attention this year with the release of "Brooklyn Castle." This film, that you can download from iTunes, Amazon or other sites, not only explores the success of IS 318 in recent Chess Nationals but documents how this inner city school has seen dramatic growth in the academics of their students by making chess a focal point of the schools curriculum and culture.

Mission San Jose also finished in fifth place in the other divisions they had teams—K-1 and K-3. Hopkins Junior High School, where many of the students are alumni of Mission San Jose Elementary School, also finished in fifth place in the K-8 Championship Section.

My Weibel Elementary School teams, as I noted above did not fair as well this year. However, they almost met my goal. I saw this year as a building year after last year's Dream Team won first in the K-6 Division. I told them I would be happy with a finish in the top ten teams in each section we entered. This came to pass in all but the K-1 section. There we took an eleventh place with 16.5 points. Actually, I am still pleased with the result as that was the same number of points that Mission San Jose obtained to win the K-6 section this year. Weibel obtained a ninth place in the K-3 Championships and an eighth place in the K-5 Championships. We did not have a team in the K-6 Championships. Former Weibel players at Irvington High School finished in sixth place in the K-9 Junior High School section. The same players last year had finished second in the K-8 Championships to Kennedy Middle School from Cupertino. This year Kennedy finished second by half a point in the K-9 Championships. Except for World Youth Co-Champion Cameron Wheeler the Kennedy school did not return all of the same players. I am not sure why. Kennedy has some other strong players including National Masters and Experts that did not come to Nashville. I hope it wasn't due to what one pundit expressed to me once, that there is no I (for individual) in team. Implying that chess is not a team sport.

As I wrote earlier—you never know what is going to happen at the Nationals. While most of the Northern California top players won trophies some of those who I expected to come out on top fell down in the standings. However, of the seven championships three NorCal players took firsts. My kudos go out to Siddharth Banik this year's K-8 champion. Rayan Taghizadeh took first in the K-5 championships and Chinguun Bayaraa became a co-champion in the K-1 division but took home the first place trophy on tie-breaks. The Scholastic rules provide that players from the same State cannot face each other for the first two rounds. This rule was created to prevent individuals who play each other all the time to avoid confronting their mates early in the National competition. In round 5 of the K-1 division Chingun Bayaraa faced Maurya Palussa a NorCal comrade. Maurya has been on a winning roll since January, jumping from 1217 to 1596. While I thought Maurya had a chance of winning the title this year he succumbed to the might of his fellow Californian.

All of these champions qualify by virtue of their victories for the World Youth Championships in the Fall. They also receive four year tuition scholarships and a \$1500 per year living stipend to the University of Texas, Dallas. The University of Texas, Dallas is considered by many as the top academic school in Texas and one of the most respected academic institutions in the country—not to mention it's winning chess team.

I was going to suggest that if you want to see how each NorCal player fared you could go to <http://uschess.org/tournaments/2013/snv/?page=RESULTS>

However, I just noticed that Michael Aigner in his blog, <http://fpawn.blogspot.com>, has done a wonderful run down of the accomplishments of most the individual NorCal players and teams in the championship divisions.

Ratings from the Super Nationals are found at: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?201304070322>

I have a few more Kudos in closing. Kudos to Tom Langland, CalChess President. He gave up his time and money to be a Director at the Super Nationals. Very seldom do you see NorCal tournament directors on the floor of a national event outside events held in California. Kudos to the TSA on changing their regulations for the ancient folk like myself. I no longer have to take my shoes off when I go through security at an airport. I am now in the same category as children12 and under.