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Chess and the 'Inner Nectar'

By Marshall Kilduff

In the world of chess — as severe as a Russian icon — there is no one quite like John Grefe, the current co-champion of the United States.

He found that his success in the national tournament in El Paso last week came as a final complement to his true creed — devotion to the Guru Maharaj-Ji, the 15-year-old prophet from India.

"I have learned in my faith that winning is nice of course, but then losing is part of life's plan, too. It is all before us to experience and see," he said quietly.

He relaxed with legs crossed amid stacks of chess magazines and books on a small mattress on the floor of a friend's apartment in Berkeley yesterday.

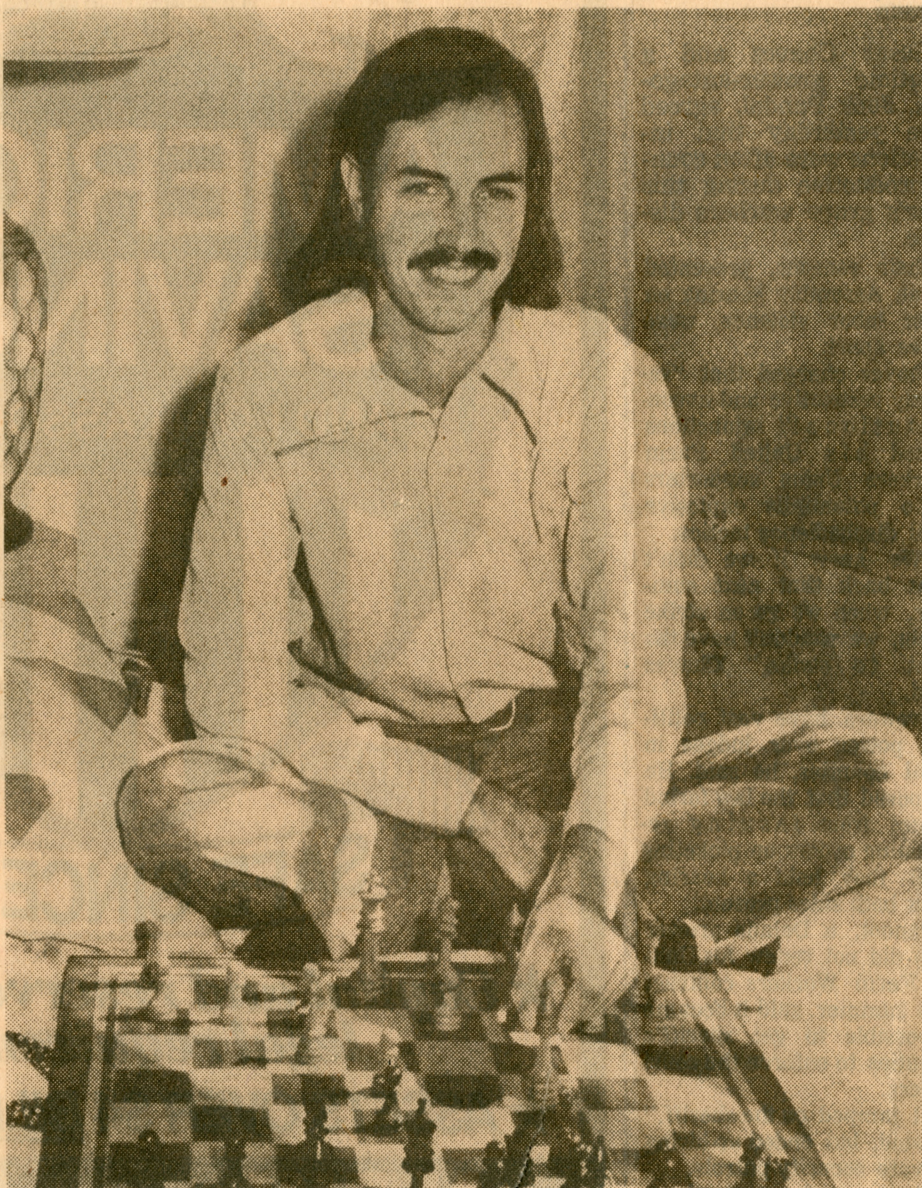
LIFE

Grefe, 26, said he has no other life apart from chess and his preaching chores for the young guru's mission in San Francisco.

But the demands of tournament play have hemmed his daily life into a continual sequence of practice and drill.

He plays chess at least four or five hours a day perfecting moves on the board or pouring over games played out by the grand masters of Europe.

He has even taught him-



By Clem Albers

BERKELEY 'CHESS BUM' JOHN GREFE
 'I have learned that losing is part of life's plan'

self to read German and Russian chess digests to sharpen his skill.

understand the Guru Maharaj," he added.

BUTTONS

Grefe has taken to wearing the guru's buttons or a pendant with a picture of the chubby-faced holy boy on it during long five-hour championship matches.

"My opponents usually come afterwards and we talk about the divine light and inner nectar that the Guru Maharaj offers," he said.

"I try very hard, but I don't think chess players are the best crowd to recruit among."

His own conversion, he said, came at a large meeting hall appearance of the young guru in 1971.

"It was instantaneous," Grefe said, "and it has made all the difference in my life."

SLIM

Grefe survives on the slim winnings from a String of chess matches across the country.

So far this year, he has earned \$3500. He won \$1750 after he tied a Czech immigrant, Lubomir Kavalek, for first place in the national tournament in El Paso.

"I'm kind of a chess bum. I don't have any permanent address and I go to each match that will pay my expenses. Right now I'm trying to get to England for a match," he said.

"I could get a job, I suppose, settle down some, but then I wouldn't have the freedom to take off for a match or put in the practice I need," he added.

TOUCH

But there is a strangely languid touch to his pursuit of chess — as though the constant mental concentration were only a playful flourish.

"None of the other players seem to understand it, but winning doesn't mean everything to me. After each match, I meditate for a while and it all fades into proper place," he said.

"There are some friends who say I am not playing at my fullest, but they don't

PRODIGY

He was something of a chess prodigy when he was the guru's age, working his way up the rankings in his home state of New Jersey.

But he found his rise blocked. "I was only a good player, not a great one — there was something missing in my game," he recalled.

"Now there is all this truth before me and I have realized it as part of life," he said. "I am a co-champion."