
CalChess REPORT

• January 1991 •

THE NEW CalChess

The new *CalChess* has adopted an ambitious program to increase chess activity in the Northern California area.

For some time now, the organization has discussed various ways to build the level of Northern California chess activity. At the last meeting (December 12, in Fremont), the decision was taken to adopt the system used by other sizable states, with an official magazine for members that will concentrate on area news, and more direct promotion of tournament and club play.

Membership services will be funded by adopting a dues schedule, with basic membership at \$10 per year, or \$6 for six months. There will also be a tournament membership, \$2, and a family membership, \$2 (one magazine to the same address).

Membership will be voluntary. New members will be recruited by offering discounts to *CalChess* members at tournaments, ranging from \$2, for the smallest tournaments and quads, to \$5 for the large tournaments. Discounts will be donated by the organizer, in return for free advertising in the magazine and other services and promotion. Northern California's active tournament players will be the nucleus of the new organization at first, but club players and club activities will soon be included so that the organization can serve all players in the state.

All of the Northern California directors we have contacted have agreed to participate in this program. The typical comment: "It's about time!"

The decision to start a new organization rests on two premises. One is that those who have responsibility for chess organization in Northern California should do more to build chess—the membership drive stats in each issue of *Chess Life*, reflecting our performance in 1988-90, compel that conclusion; Northern California remains mired in 50th (!) place.

Another premise is that an active organization enables us to do more for chess than an inactive one. Dues and a magazine are connections between the state organization and the chess community that provide an exchange of information and a commitment to furnish services, and these connections will improve the retention rate of current players and enhance the appeal of the game to new players. It is essentially a matter of marketing the game, to give area players more value and enjoyment for their chess dollar.

In 1990 in Northern California, for the first time in many years, there were not even enough tournaments to fill all the three-day weekends (no state championship on Labor Day), and there was a decline of eighty USCF members last year (from 2976 in 12/89 to 2896 in 12/90). While the number of tournaments was about the same, the number of rated games declined, reflecting a shift from larger two-day and three-day tournaments to smaller one-day tournaments.

The goal of the new *CalChess* is to reverse this trend, and give Northern California players more and better opportunities to enjoy what is described in those ubiquitous Nintendo commercials as "the ultimate strategy game."

A PREVIEW OF 1991

Preliminary indications are that the bear market in Northern California chess has bottomed out. 1991 shows every indication of being an exciting year for players.

There are already three mega-events on the 1991 calendar. The U.S. Open returns to Los Angeles, giving aficionados a rare opportunity to play in the country's premiere tournament for average players. Led by Jerry Hanken, the Angelenos have set the ambitious goal of breaking their own record, Pasadena 1983, for the largest US Open ever. And Bill Goichberg is preparing a bid to bring the US Class Championships to San Francisco for Veterans Day, a national championship tour-

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nament that will draw players from around the country. Mssrs. Burger and Falconer are also planning another Pan-Pacific Grandmaster Tournament, to be held in San Francisco from February 24-March 9, 1991, which the organizers hope to make a first-rate international tournament, with the participation of some of the world's strongest male and female grandmasters, and with a high school championship to be held in conjunction, providing a unique opportunity for the best of the local scholastic corps to rub shoulders with the best in the world.

CalChess will this year hold a state championship on Labor Day, awarding state champion titles in all classes. Organized by John Barnard, *CalChess* vice-president, who for many years organized big-money events in SoCal, the tournament will guarantee over six thousand dollars in prizes and should attract a large, strong field. The winner of that tournament will be state champion, and plans are underway to schedule a match between the Northern California champion and the Southern California champion for the unified state title.

Within the next two months there will be an announcement of an official magazine, providing complete coverage of Northern California chess. Our own magazine will provide more complete information about upcoming events than Chess Life or any other source (with the possible exception of Alan Glasscoe's excellent clearinghouse report, copy enclosed), and will publish the results of all club and weekend tournaments, including non-USCF, blitz, and action tournaments.

Both LERA and UC Berkeley plan to hold their traditional slate of tournaments, and both clubs have plans to improve their events this year.

And there are other new things on the horizon. This year there will be a California State Women's Championship in Northern California, a first for this region, organized by Ray Orwig and Carolyn Withgitt. The Sacramento area, with a tradition of strong chess

since the era when Ed Edmonson ran things, is planning to resume holding weekend tournaments, with a new cadre of directors.

In short, if you like chess, you'll love 1991, because it promises to be a memorable year for those of us who enjoy the royal game.

TRANSITIONS: CASTLE CLUB

One of the most colorful chapters in Northern California chess will come to a close this month as the Castle Chess Club in San Francisco holds its final meeting and disbands.

Founded in 1928 by a group of enthusiastic youngsters (Guthrie McClain, Henry Gross, Russ Freeman, Curtis Wilson, and others), the club set the local standard for quality players and quality events for over six decades. For most of that period, the winner of the Castle Club championship (usually Henry Gross), was acknowledged to be the de facto San Francisco champion (although Mike Goodall hastens to remind me that he won the club championship in 1963).

As the founders attained their golden years, the infusion of new blood into what was essentially a fraternal organization could not sustain the club's energy, and in recent years Castle events have tapered off.

For those interested in the history of area chess, club member Mike Goodall is preparing a feature article for the February *California Chess Journal*.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of *CalChess* is tentatively scheduled for the Hayward Chess Club (Mission and C Streets) on Monday, February 11, 1991.

CalChess

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