

SF News
Dec 3, 1955

Chess Interest Is High in California

Mechanics' Institute in S. F. Known as Oldest Club in U. S.

By Imre Konig, International Chess Master

Many Europeans think of California as a land of eternal sunshine and a playground, but I was pleasantly surprised three years ago to discover that California is one of the cultural centers of the United States, and that chess plays an important role. That the rush of the American way of life should leave time for such a time-absorbing game was indeed an agreeable surprise.

My first visit was to Los Angeles, where Herman Steiner's Hollywood chess group gave me quite a thrill. There I met chess players of all nationalities, some of whom I had met years ago in Europe, having lost trace of them subsequently.

Hollywood Visit

The wall of the chess room in Hollywood is decorated with photos of the great chess masters and many movie stars playing chess.

While I can say with authority that, except for Humphrey Bogart, none of the movie stars excels at the game of chess, in the photos they convey the impression that they are real chess fans.

This makes me think that perhaps chess masters might be more successful if they learned to act.

Another great center of chess in California is the chess room of the Mechanics' Institute in San Francisco. The Institute proudly claims to be the oldest chess club in the United States, and has just completed a Centenary Chess Tournament to celebrate its founding one hundred years ago.

Early Chess

It is astonishing to think that people in the 1850's just after the gold rush had time for the playing of chess. It is even more astonishing that the first record of chess in America dates back to the 15th century.

It is related by Hiram Bingham ("Pachu Micchu, the Lost City of the Incas") that the Spanish soldiers played chess, and that one of the last rulers of the Incas, Manco, was killed in the early 16th century by a refugee Spanish soldier in a dispute over a game of chess.

Although the authenticity of the story as to whether the game

was chess or something else is uncertain, the fact that chess was played at the time in Peru is not disputed.

The Mechanics' Institute chess room is open every day from 9 a.m. until 10 p.m., a feature that few other chess clubs enjoy.

The other leading club in San Francisco is the Golden Gate Chess Club, which meets in the Somerton Hotel on Tuesdays from 7 p.m. This club has won the Bay Area Chess League team championship twice.

It is active in promoting interest in young players and has five talented youngsters who are still in their teens, but are among the strongest players in the city.

Main Event

The "main event" of the California chess season is the annual North versus South team match, in which 140 or 150 players participate. Both sides travel some 220 miles every Memorial Day to San Luis Obispo for the match.

Traveling such a distance for one game of chess might surprise some persons, but not the dyed-in-the-wool chess player.

Even so, the conquest of distances is the chief problem in chess, and it is for this reason that correspondence chess is becoming more and more popular.

To give our readers who live away from chess centers the chance to play competitive chess, we have decided to sponsor correspondence chess tournaments.

Groups of Five

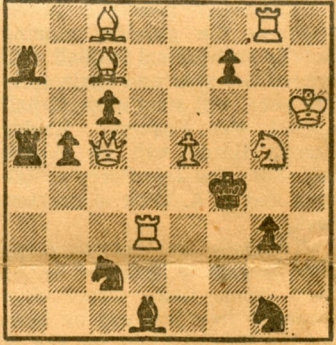
The tournaments will be played in groups of five players. Each player will, therefore, have four games going, and will have four to five days in which to make his moves in the four games.

Those interested in joining the correspondence groups should send in name, address and telephone number, whereupon they will be promptly notified of their opponents. Winners in the groups will receive book prizes.

Book Prizes

Those who are interested should furnish name, address and telephone number, and specify that they want to play games over the board. Winners will receive book prizes and, at the conclusion, the participants will be classified as to ratings, if desired.

It is with deep regret that we learn of the death of Herman Steiner, international master, former U. S. chess champion and present California champion. Mr. Steiner died suddenly on Friday, Nov. 25, of a massive coronary. He was 51.



Task No. 125—By Dr. E. Palkosko
White Mates in Two Moves
(Value four points)
Answer to Task No. 124: QKT-Kt2