

CHESS BARBS

by Jude Acers (US senior master)
INTERVIEW WITH ONE OF "THE HOLLOW MEN": Senior master, soon to become internationally titled, John Grefe returned to Berkeley in triumph, co-owner of the 1973-74 US Championship. Before hitting the European tournament trial in quest of more fame and fortune, the new US Champion stopped long enough to grant this in-depth interview with a local chess reporter.

QUESTION: Congratulations on winning the U.S. Championship! How did you do it?

ANSWER: The pairings were right. I had the right colors against the right players and I started out with a few wins against the lower half of the field, which helped my confidence.

In addition, I was playing well, was well prepared and I was doing a lot of meditating. My mind was very clear.

Q.: Why haven't we heard from John Grefe before now?

A.: Well, we have, actually. In big Swiss system tournaments that I have played in I have gotten fairly good results. I came in sixth in the US Open this year, tied for eighth in 1969 and 1971, tied for first in the National Open in 1971, came in fourth or fifth at Lone Pine, 1971, and tied for fourth through sixth at Lone Pine, 1973. My rating has been over 2300 for the past two years.

Young masters in the U.S. very rarely get a chance to compete in national events like the U.S. Championship, where they get to play against only top-flight competition and where playing conditions are conducive to high quality chess.

Q.: Do you think you would have done as well if Fischer, Robert Byrne and Reshevsky had participated?

A.: I could have played as well, but I don't know whether my result would have been as good. Even though the top three players in the US did not compete, five of those who did are international grandmasters and one is an international master. Four of the players have taken a fair number of first and second prizes in international competition.

The US Closed Championship includes the 14 highest rated US players. Generally, a few players decline their invitations and substitutes are invited on the basis of rating. In the last several years there have been no real surprises in US chess: the person who was supposed to win did.

Q.: What are your vital statistics in chess?

A.: Age, 26. Birth place, Hoboken, New Jersey, but a resident of Berkeley for the past five years.

I learned chess at ten, finally understood all the rules when I was 13 and began playing USCF tournaments when I was 15.

I won the first USCF tournament I played in, a local club event, and my first USCF rating was 2131. However, I have been playing tournament chess for only about seven years now, because for three years I was in the military service.

Q.: Was it right after your tour of duty, then, that the quality of your chess suddenly rose?

A.: No. I came to Berkeley, and

there happened to be a number of chess masters living there. We organized some tournaments among ourselves and occasionally played against each other in the various random local Swiss system events. I improved gradually as opposition improved.

Q.: What can you do as US Champion to make it worth while winning the title?

A.: I've never had great ambitions in chess, to be world champion or anything like that. I've just studied chess and whatever happens, happens.

Now that I am US Champion, I hope to use my influence with the US Chess Federation to assist other young masters to attain their titles and also to promote chess generally.

In relation to past US championships, the prizes have been increasing at a steady rate. However, in another field of endeavor a person of equivalent status would receive a far greater financial reward for his work. Perhaps I'll be able to make some money from exhibitions and lectures. I've always felt that it would be advantageous financially to hold a grandmaster title, and it would allow me to play chess against the world's best players.

I think that the title of US Champion carries a certain amount of prestige in relation to foreign tournament organizers. Perhaps when the news of this tournament reaches them and they play over some of the games, they will be anxious to invite me to play in their tournaments. My initial results in European tournaments will be important, as if I do well it will confirm my result in the US Championship.

I'm going to be playing in the second section of the Hastings Christmas Tournament this year, and the winner is automatically qualified for the premier event next year. I will also be playing in the Beverwijk master event at the beginning of 1974. But these are not exactly plums for a US champion.

Q.: How were the playing conditions and organization of the US Championship?

A.: Playing conditions were excellent. We played at the Hotel Paso del Norte in El Paso, Texas. George Koltanowski was the tournament director and William Lukowiak was assistant director. They both did a fine job. The lighting was good, too.

The organizers were a bit disappointed at the low turnout of spectators but this was not so

disagreeable to me, as my experience has been that most spectators at chess tournaments are unaware of proper behavior, and merely distract the players with excess noise.

Although local coverage was excellent, the tournament was poorly covered in the national press. Col. Edmondson, director of the national chess federation, says that the reason for this is that reports were sent every day over the wire services, but the editors of individual newspapers have the discretion of whether or not to use the reports. If the chess public wants better coverage of chess events, they will have to deluge their local media with requests for news.

Q.: Can you say anything about the performance of Walter Browne and James Tarjan, also of Berkeley?

A.: They both played well and generally their performance was rather high.

Tarjan might have added another point to his score had he made full use of his opportunities. He suffered an early loss to Mednis that hurt his chances for a higher place in the final standings.

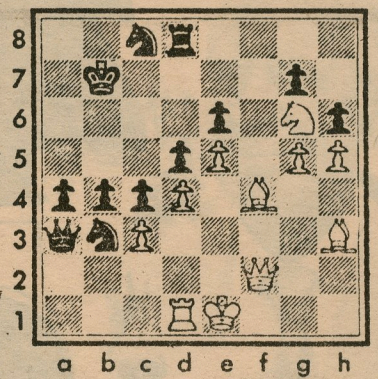
Q.: What are your interests apart from chess playing?

A.: I would like to learn a few foreign languages. I may author a book of the tournament with background material and annotations to most of the games.

I'd like to go to the Soviet Union in order to gain insights into their chess sub-culture and also to promote closer relations between the chess federations and players of our countries. I am a devotee of Guru Maharaj Ji and I spend a lot of time doing meditation and propagating his Knowledge.

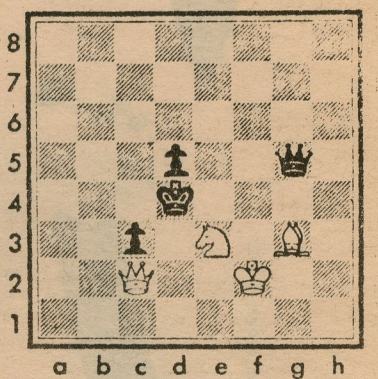
* * *

White: John Grefe. Black: Edmar Mednis. US Championship, El Paso, 1973. French Defense
 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 Bc3(plus) 6 bc Qc7 7 Nf3 b6 8 Bb5(plus) Bd7 9 Bd3 c4 10 Be2 Ba4 11 Bf4 Ne7 12 Qd2 Nbc6 13 h4 0-0-0 14 h5 h6 15 g4 Rdf8 16 Rcl Qd7 17 Qe3 Kb7 18 Kd2 Nc8 19 Nh4 Rhg8 20 Bg3 Qe7 21 Ral Re8 22 f4 f6 23 Bfl Qd7 24 Bh3 Rgf8 25 Rael fe 26 fe Na5 27 Ng6 Rf7 28 Bh4 Bc2 29 Kc2 Qa4(plus) 30 Kd2 Nb3(plus) 31 Ke2 Qa3 32 Rdl Qb2(plus) 33 Kel a5 34 Bg3 a4 35 Rh2 Qa3 36 Rf2 Rf2 37 Qf2 Rd8 38 Bf4 b5 39 g5 b4 40 gh gh 41 Bh6 bc 42 Be6 Nb6 43 Bf5 Qb2 44 Rbl Qf2(plus)



Position after 39...b4
 45 Kf2 Nd4 46 Rb6(plus) Kb6
 47 Be3 Kc5 48 Nf4 Rf8 49 Ne6
 (plus) Kb4 50 Nd4 a3 51 e6 a2
 52 e7 Rf5(plus) 53 Nf5 aQ 54 e8Q
 Qh1 55 Qb8(plus) Ka3 56 Bc5(plus)
 Ka2 57 Qa7(plus) Kbl 58 Qb7(plus)
 Ka2 59 Qa7(plus) Kbl 60 Qb7(plus)
 Ka2 61 Qa6(plus) Kbl 62 Qb5(plus)
 Kc2 63 Bd6 Qh5 64 Ne3(plus) Kcl
 65 Ba3(plus) Kd2 66 Nc4(plus)
 Kd3 67 Ne3(plus) Ke4 68 Qb4(plus)
 Kd3 69 Qbl(plus) Kd4 70 Qb4(plus)
 70 Qb4(plus) Kd3 71 Qbl(plus)

Kd4 72 Bd6 Qh4(plus) 73 Bg3
 Qg5 74 Qb4(plus) Kd3 75 Qb5(plus)
 Ke4 76 Qa4(plus) Kd3 77 Qc2(plus)
 Kd4 78 Qa4(plus) Kd3 79 Qc2(plus)
 Kd4.



Position after 79...Kd4
 80 Nf5(plus) Kc4 81 Qa4(plus)
 Kd3 82 Qd4(plus) Kc2 83 Ne3
 (plus) Kb3 84 Qb6(plus) Ka4 85
 Qa6(plus) Kb3 86 Qb5(plus) Ka2
 87 Qa4(plus) Kb2 88 Qc2(plus) Ka3
 89 Bd6mate.