

Plans to Reap The Chess Craze

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By Keith Power

It is an improbable, if intriguing glimpse at the future.

In tens of millions of American homes sports fans are hunched transfixed before their television sets — knuckles whitening on beer cans — as the color screen displays an intricate chess pattern and the commentator intones:

“San Francisco, the underdog going into this national championship race, rapped out with an unexpected Nimzo-Indian opening and apparently surprised New York into a Scilian Defense. . .”

It is an improbable vision, agrees Cyrus Weiss, a San Francisco entrepreneur who has organized America's first professional chess team called the “Check Mates.”

Chess will never develop the wild-eyed television following of professional football or baseball in this country, he said yesterday while watching a few of his team members handle a public exhibition at the Embarcadero Center.

But with the proper presentation and the organization of a professional American Chess League — laid out on a city-by-city rivalry like the more bruising endeavors — he said chess could find a mass following equal to golf or tennis.

“Professional chess in America is just emerging,” he said. “The Bobby Fischer stories helped a lot. He was right there on front page with Vietnam and the Democratic convention.”

He went so far as to describe the phenomena as similar to the hula-hoop craze. . . “All you need is a \$5 chess set and you're ready to play.”

Weiss, who has a background in broadcasting, said chess can become popular entertainment if it is treated through television with the same broadcasting finesse that is applied to golf — a game with equally, interminable pauses in the action.

“We can't get the American public to wait while they ponder the full time for a move,” Weiss said. “But we can take the highlights out of the chess game, use split screen techniques and knowledgeable people for annotation,” and present an exciting package.”

He is engaged in discussions with promoters in Los Angeles and New York, he said, over the foundation of the professional chess league and hopes to produce a challenger to match the stature of Bobby Fischer.

John Grefe, one of the 16 members of Weiss' team who was appearing at the



DENNIS FRITZINGER OF THE 'CHECK MATES' PLAYED FIVE SIMULTANEOUS GAMES
S.F. entrepreneur Cyrus Weiss organized the first U.S. professional chess team

Embarcadero and Golden Gateway Center exhibitions, has nominated himself as a candidate to challenge the pre-eminent American player.

Grefe, a soft-spoken young man from Hoboken, N.J., has been helping to support himself in the Bay Area for several years by giving chess lessons and win-

ning tournament prizes.

He carried off a modest \$150 from a statewide contest held last weekend at the University of California at Berkeley. The U.S. Chess

Federation, the official body, rates him the 20th best player in the country.

“I hope for the opportunity to play Mr. Fischer very soon,” he said.