

## Board wars check into Lake Merritt Boathouse

By Tyler Cunningham  
STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — For a few hours on Saturday, Carl Jiles Jr. gave up his dreams of touchdowns and home runs to pursue a different kind of victory — a checkmate.

The 10-year-old was just one of about 100 participants who spent the day at the Lake Merritt Boathouse competing in Oakland's first chess tournament.

"I've been reading books and practicing all week," said Jiles, who won \$400 by taking first place in the 11-and-under category. "I still like sports better, but chess is a challenge. It works your brain muscle."

The program was the idea of Gene Hazzard, who has set up chess tables outside his Thrift N' Things Antique Shop for years. Hazzard approached the city, suggesting a program to teach the game of kings to the uninitiated.

The city's Office of Parks and Recreation

jumped on the idea, setting aside some \$33,000 to hire five employees for the program. By early November, the Youth Mentor Chess Program had begun.

Regular tournaments are just one element of the club. Six days a week, between noon and 5 p.m., staff members will be stationed outside the Lakeview Branch library, supervising games and offering instructions to newcomers.

The program has drawn the praise of a certified grandmaster, George Koltanowski, who stopped by the tournament to encourage the budding Bobby Fischers.

"The youth are taking over the game," said Koltanowski. "And it's good for them. It teaches them about life. In chess, you learn to think three, four, five moves ahead. Many young men today don't even think about where they will be tomorrow."

It's these kids whom the program targets. Melvin Roberts, the tournament director, said

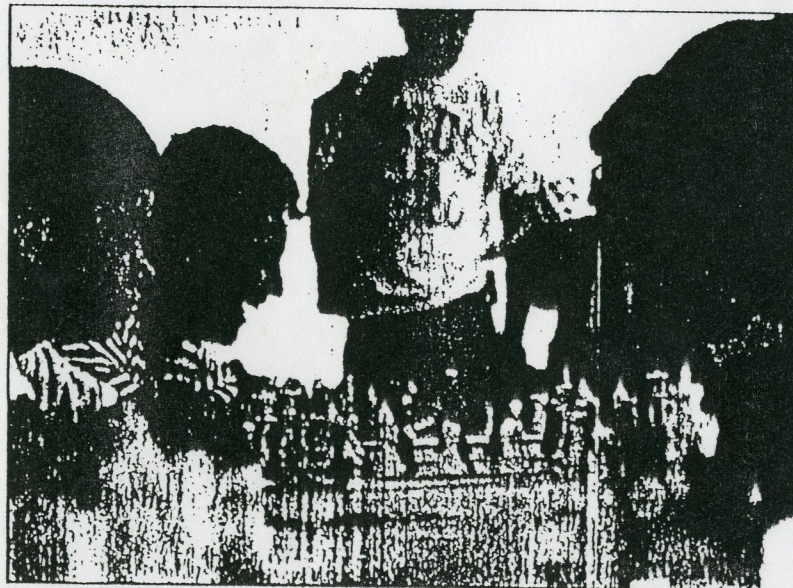
young people learn valuable lessons from the 1,300-year-old game. They learn about patience, and the basic lesson of action and consequence.

"And when they pick up the game, their faces light up," he said. "It gives them a shot of self-esteem to know they can pick up this game."

Demetrius Goins is one such success story. As a young kid in Oakland, Goins said he was in trouble constantly. When his mother tried to reform him by sending him to his uncle's Fresno home, Goins was bored. Goins turned his attention to his uncle's chess set.

The 16-year-old returned home to discover a new talent. He began winning games against increasingly tough competition. Now Goins is one of the five city employees helping Oaklanders learn the game, and he hopes to be a professional player someday.

"The game honestly changed my life," he said. "And not just because of the job. I think differently. I look ahead."



RAY CIAVEZ/Staff

Ed Garcia, left, and Junaid Syken, both 13, were among the participants in the chess tournament at the Lake Merritt Sailboat House.