

BULK RATE
U.S. Postage Paid
Sunnyvale, California
Permit No. 208

THE SUN

SUNNYVALE'S NEWSPAPER

Vol. 4, Number 9
July 17, 1996



Photograph by George Sakkestad

Richard Shorman picks up the pieces, surrounded by Nick Conway, Amy Calip, Bernard Calip and Mary Fitzgerald.

Toppling Kings

A master of chess teaches all the right moves at Lockheed  page 13

Chess Master

Expert puts the moves on the game of kings

BY CRISTY SHAUCK

If it's Tuesday night, you're sure to find a dozen or so disciples surrounding chess master Richard Shorman, who lectures on the topic each week at Lockheed Martin.

Folks driving past Lockheed Martin Missiles and Space late Tuesday nights may be startled to see shadowy figures stumbling out of LERA, Lockheed's Employee Recreation Association building. The suspicions have merit, for those creatures of the night are plotting to overthrow a king.

These would-be assassins are chess players. They come from as far away as Sacramento to hear a master of the game, Richard Shorman, lecture on how to win.

Inside, a dozen or so players gather around a long table while Shorman sets up his equipment: a vinyl roll-up chess board, pieces, a laptop computer and a monitor.

"Will you kindly stand aside for the time it takes to turn on the screen?" Shorman asks. "This is an older monitor and probably emits radiation. Four feet distance is approximately correct." The audience laughs, but they obey. "Are you now properly irradiated?" he adds.

Every player should own a chess computer, but there's no substitute for playing actual games, says Shorman, who wrote a chess column for several years in the 1970s. Most players are reluctant to compete without consulting numerous books because every tournament game they play affects their rating, and, well, they don't like to lose.

Sandwiched between lessons, the chess guru frequently offers bits of his Eastern-style philosophy on life: "You have to perform actions in this world. Chess is one of those things you can perform

that gives you a perspective on other things."

It's also a way to humiliate an enemy that's perfectly acceptable; it's a game that has amused royalty, distracted monks and frustrated the rest of humanity for 13 centuries.

Attached to his belt, small pouches straddle Shorman's hips like holsters. Tucked inside the khaki one are a calculator, a chess computer, pens and other tools of his trade. Eyeglasses occupy the black pouch.

It's apparently rare to find somebody as talented as Shorman who's willing to teach.

"He's entertaining and concise; every word he says is important," says Sunnyvale resident Kevin Begley, who heard about the chess club on a computer bulletin board posting.

At Begley's first meeting, Shorman handed him a photocopy of a hundred chess problems. "I did 'em all in a week," the computer engineer says. "I would guess Richard was a schoolteacher. There are people who play chess and people who teach chess, and usually the two don't ever meet. But he's a great teacher."

Some speculate that Shorman was a spy, which is a little closer to the truth. He did a four-year Army hitch, spending time in Munich, Germany, where he translated Russian into English and English into Russian. In the basement of a library there, he discovered Soviet chess books and spent his free time translating them.



Shorman gently needles students, who appreciate his humor-laced teaching style. Photograph by George Sakkestad

After the service, Shorman continued translating, a profession which he claims turned him into a night owl. "Cryptography is something generally done at night," he explains.

Begley was told Shorman hasn't missed a Tuesday in 10 years. Sunnyvale resident John Romo, rated a chess expert, who's been coming to LERA for 17 years, knows that Shorman began holding court almost 30 years ago, when the club was founded by former Lockheed employee Jim Hurt.

After 10 years of tournament playing, Shorman gave it up. "I could see the way things were going, and I didn't want to play that kind of chess," he says, referring to the big money winners can earn ("In my day you got a handshake and a little trophy") and the tighter pigeonholing of players by their rankings.

Those curious about Shorman's ability can review a game he played against a computer that was published in the October/November 1993 issue of *California Chess Journal*. Shorman, victorious, looked on while several master-rated players were defeated by the computer after Shorman had played his game. One player lost 10 times before giving up in disgust.

"I won because of my style," Shorman explains.

Over the years, such local chess luminaries as masters Gabriel Sanchez, Robert Kichinski and

Renard Anderson have attended Shorman's talks at Lockheed.

Although the LERA club meets too late for Vinay Bhat, 11, the youngest U.S. national master, he studied with Shorman for three years and developed a solid chess foundation.

"Mr. Shorman always said, 'Do your homework,'" Bhat recalls.

A June graduate of Cupertino's Faria Academics Plus School, Bhat took first place in the National Junior High School Chess Championships held in Florida last April.

Although he has no children of his own, Shorman has made an impression on hundreds of elementary-school children who play chess. He tutors a lucky few like Bhat in their homes and teaches hundreds more at Bay Area campuses.

The LERA group has become a family. For instance, when Doug Decker of Sunnyvale was killed in a freak skydiving accident a couple of years ago, players attended a wake in his honor.

Good games, bad games, changes in ranking—all the latest chess gossip gets dished at LERA.

Players with thin skins shouldn't attend unless they want to toughen up. Shorman gently needles players while reviewing their games in front of the group.

The night THE SUN visits, it's San Jose dermatologist Walter Wood's turn to be roasted. Grinning sheepishly, Wood takes it on the chin as

Shorman razzes him for playing too cautiously.

"You are fortunate in Walter's personality because if he weren't this way, you wouldn't have faith in him as a doctor," Shorman says.

"You don't want him experimenting with bizarre moves on your body. Let us not criticize too much here." The audience, including Wood, laughs.

Instead of memorizing opening moves, students should memorize the moves of chess games that have the principles elucidated in them, Shorman says. A true believer should buy a copy of *The 1,000 Best Short Games of Chess*, play over all the games, then memorize 400 of them.

"Even children whom I've taught have been able to memorize 100 full-length games," says Shorman. Like Bobby Fisher, he believes that a good memory, good visualization and determination are essential for playing chess well.

"Threats and more force," Shorman pipes up. "That's all I can find as a common denominator to every part of teaching chess. If you identify your opponent's threat after his move, then generate on your side a threat greater than or equal to his and marry that move with what you know about good chess principles—that means bringing up more new pieces—you can become quite good without knowing theory."

