

Monday

U.S. Chess Day:

Grand master takes on
all comers at Y-S gala



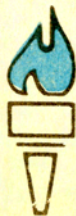
/Lifestyles C1

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YUBA-SUTTER



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Marysville-Yuba City, Calif.

Checkmate

Chess exhibition at Peach Tree Mall

Story by Garth Rogers

Photography by Dave Nielsen
of The Appeal-Democrat

The third ranked chess player in the United States moved his king's pawn to king-four. He then continued to move pawns and knights until he had circled past 30 chess boards during the opening moves of a chess exhibition held at the Peach Tree Mall Saturday.

Nick deFirmian, who will compete later this month for the U.S. Chess Championship, was playing against up to 30 people at one time as part of a celebration of National Chess Day, sponsored by the Yuba-Sutter Chess Club and the Peach Tree Mall Merchants Association.

During the five hours of continuous chess play, deFirmian played 40 games. He lost two and drew six. This reporter was among the 32 players that deFirmian beat. It took him only 20 moves to destroy my meager defenses and score a victory, his first of the day.

Before the competition began, the chess enthusiasts who had paid their \$15 to try to beat one of the best chess players in the nation were obviously nervous as they fidgeted and paced around the main mall entrance where the boards were set up, waiting for the games to begin.

But the 28-year-old deFirmian was calm and confident, accustomed to the tension of playing in chess tournaments throughout the world.

Once the games began, the tension in the players did not recede as deFirmian quickly moved around the inside of the large circle of tables on which the chess games were set up. The noise from spectators and the blaring of the mall's public address system announcing hay rides or other such activities added to the tension of many of the players, though deFirmian said yesterday that he did not notice the noise because he was concentrating so hard on the games.

When deFirmian arrived at a game, the opposing player had 10 seconds in which to move or to pass, with only three passes allowed. It seemed like it took no time at all for deFirmian to make his rounds and some players, such as myself, were never quite ready to move, not having had a chance to completely think through the moves.

DeFirmian said he noticed that many people were playing book openings that most all grand masters, such as himself, would recognize. He said that was not difficult to deal with, nor were the simply bad moves. Occasionally someone would make a surprise move, he said, and he would have to pause at the game and take a little more time to respond.

When he plays simultaneous games, he said, he does not have time to study the boards in detail. He has to quickly determine the best answer to his opponents move and the position of his pieces. He said in simultaneous games good players, such as the two who beat him, are more able to capitalize on small mistakes that he might make in moving so quickly.

DeFirmian said he was surprised that the games Saturday all lasted as long as they did, the first loss coming almost an hour after the competition began. He said that when he last played in a simultaneous game here, in January of 1984, many of the games were over within the first 15 minutes.

Although the games lasted longer, in the end only two people came out victorious over deFirmian, who expects to do well in the U.S. Championship. One of the players to whom he lost, Henry Giertych, a Marysville dentist, is a former chess master. The other man, Richard Fauber, the chess columnist for the Sacramento Bee, is a chess master.

Giertych's 17-year-old son, Tim, was one of the six players who were able to achieve draws with deFirmian, said Yuba-Sutter Chess Club manager Leon Taylor. The others who achieved draws were Yuba-Sutter Chess Club tournament director Leonard Sisteck, Beamon B. Hill of Olivehurst, Rick Shepard of Scotts Valley, William Lombard of Sacramento and Mark Braverman of Davis.

As a follow up to the simultaneous game, deFirmian held a seminar yesterday to discuss chess openings and strategy. He said prior to the seminar that he plays about three simultaneous games each year. He said they help him to practice his concentration, which is so important in tournament play. He said an average tournament game will last about five hours, which is how long it took him to play the 40 games at the Peach Tree Mall.

He said the simultaneous game gave him a chance to try out a lot of openings and defenses that he will consider using in the U.S. Championship in Colorado, which will be held from Oct. 21 to Nov. 6.

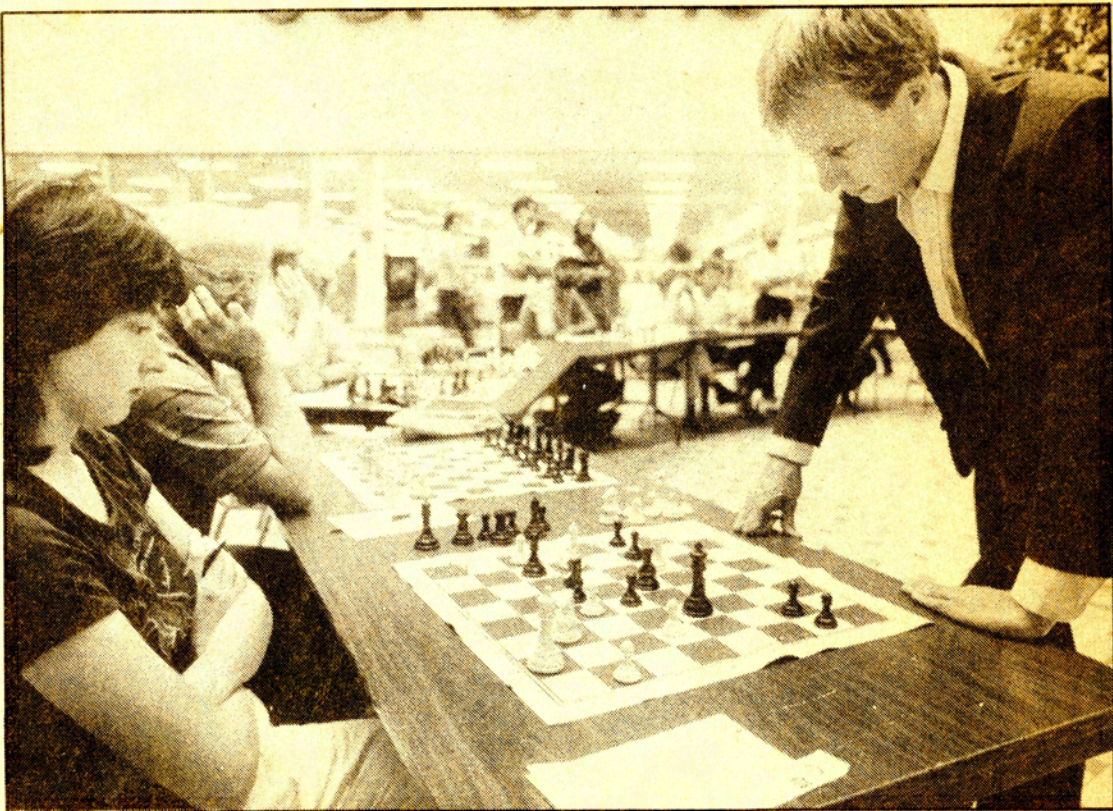
DeFirmian said he plans to spend the time between now and the U.S. Chess Championship studying to see if he can come up with a few surprise moves for his opponents.

DeFirmian holds a physics degree from UC-Berkeley and, though he lives in Oakland, he considers the Yuba-Sutter Chess Club his home club.

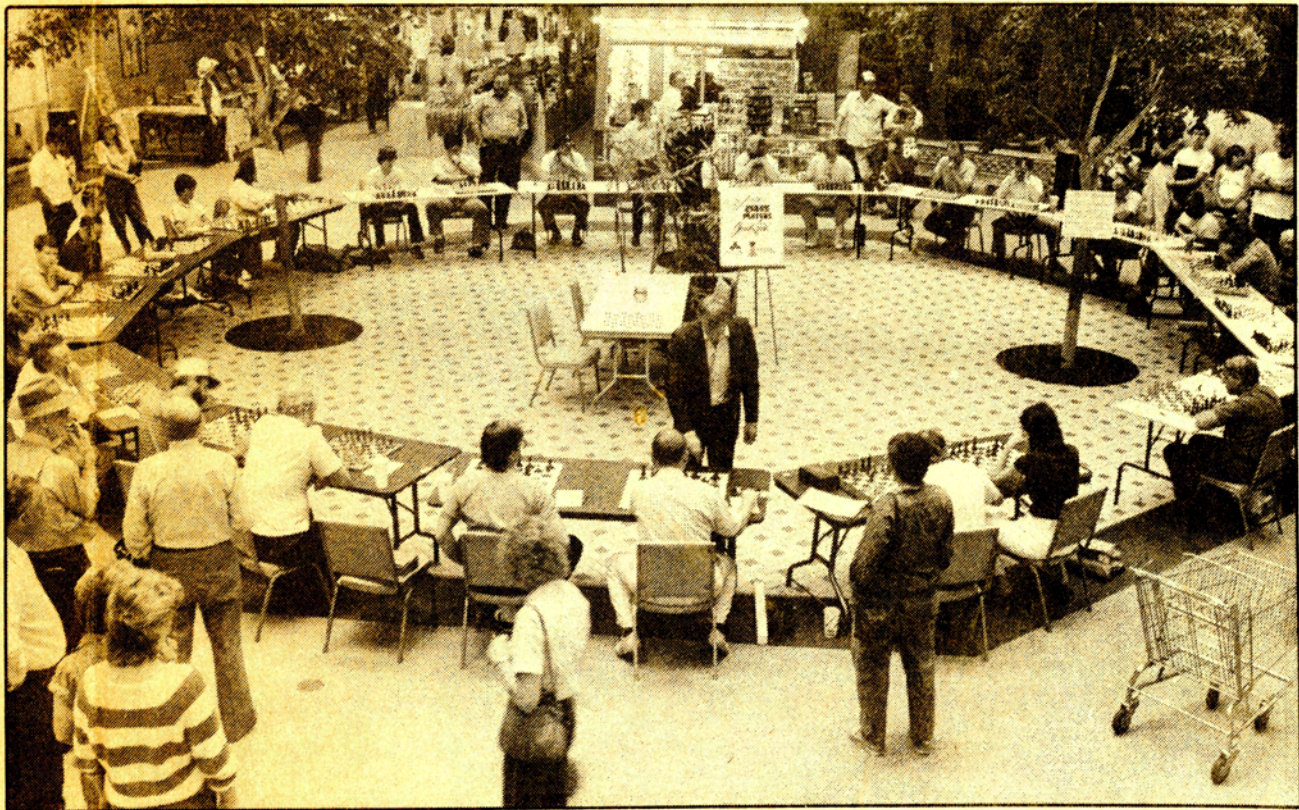
The Yuba-Sutter Chess Club meets every Tuesday night from 5 p.m. to midnight upstairs in the community room at the Peach Tree Mall.



George McGrew of Marysville contemplates his next move during Saturday's chess exhibition at the Peach Tree Mall.



Nick deFirmian pauses at the table of Debrah Cvetic.



DeFirmian played up to 30 chess players at once.