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Chess moms check it out



Alberta Quinlan, left, and Shirley Tabiando, mothers of young chess players, play in an exhibition during Sunday's tournament.

Young players, parents battle tourney pressure

BY GINA BOUBION
Mercury News Staff Writer

As the youngest chess master ever, Palo Alto 10-year-old Jordy Mont-Reynaud was the boy to beat at the 1994 National Chess Championship for elementary school kids.

And in the sixth round Sunday, Matthew Seiden of New York City did it, sending shock waves through the San Jose Civic Auditorium.

"I'm not the only mother here who will be disappointed on Mother's Day," said Randy Mont-Reynaud, his mother. "Jordy will survive this."

Sponsored by Intel Corp., the chess tournament attracted 1,200

players from kindergarten through sixth-grade nationally. First prize at the three-day event was a Pentium powered Intel computer, which went to Harutyun Akopyan, a Los Angeles sixth-grader.

Jordy took second place after defeating ninth-place Vinay Bhat of Cupertino in round seven. Matthew placed third, after losing to Harutyun in the final game. Seventh-place went to Micah Fischer-Kirshner from Weibel Elementary in Fremont. Mission San Jose School in Fremont came in third place as a team.

Upsets shocked players and

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Chess master Jordy Mont-Reynaud of Palo Alto considers his options during a match at Sunday's national championships for elementary school children in San Jose. He finished second.

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1,200 chess whizzes vie for glory of being No. 1

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parents alike Sunday and revealed the darker side of the competition: the sometimes overbearing parents of the chess world.

Pressure on Jordy was intense in his match with Matthew, who seized Jordy's bishop early. The bespectacled fourth-grader struggled to keep afloat for the remainder of the 3½-hour game as dozens of coaches and parents looked on from the spectator section 15 feet away.

Jordy's loss was a disappointment to Harutyun, an Armenian immigrant who ranked second going into the tournament.

"I was hoping to play Jordy this time," Harutyun said. "He's good. It would have been fun."

Said Jordy, "I'm a little upset, but I'll try to forget about it."

Matthew's games were dedicated to his grandmother, who died in January.

"This is the first Mother's Day that his father didn't have his mother around, so Matthew wanted to dedicate the tournament to her," said Lili Mahlab-Seiden of New York City. "Mat-

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thew was very close to her."

As the tournament approached the beginning of the seventh and final round, resentment between parents was palpable. In the back of the chess hall, children cried into their hands after round six of the seven-round tournament, and parents gave each other the brush-off.

Others grudgingly shook hands after the defeats and wins of their children. One boy held back tears as his mother tried to get him to talk on her cellular phone. Other parents whisked their children away from the crowded chess hall to recover from defeat in solitude.

"There's a lot of ego in this game," said Andres Diaz from New York City, whose 8-year-old Daniela competed. "There's no money in chess. So you have

nothing to gain other than to say, 'my kid is No. 1.' Some of these parents get more upset than their kids if they lose."

Parents also complained of an East-West rivalry. The New Yorkers say the Californians have less competition, therefore advancing further than if they were competing in New York. The Californians say the New Yorkers have a "chess machine" with school chess clubs and sponsorships.

By the end of the day, parents seemed to relax as their children put the games behind them. Out-of-towners started talking about trips to Disneyland and Fisherman's Wharf.

As the parents said, chess is like hockey season. One loss doesn't a loser make.

"To be a world champion means you have to be able to lose," said Randy Mont-Reynaud. "And what happened today was a glorious example of that. But it's only one game, one tournament. We're in it for the long