

THE AMERICAN OPEN 1977

It's hard to believe that 552 people would foresake their traditional Thanksgiving dinner in order to batter heads across the chess board. Perhaps this in itself was reason enough for six different television crews to make an appearance on the first day of the 13th Annual American Open Chess Tournament, which was held at the Hilton hotel in downtown Los Angeles during the recent Thanksgiving weekend. Are these people playing for the money? *SURE!* The total prize fund, covering both an open and a booster section, as well as umpteen classes, amounted to some \$8,000. Of that 8,000 only 2,000 was divided between the two people who tied for first place, each getting 1,000. Now we all know that this is about what Jack Nicklaus pays his caddy when he wins a small tournament. So how can I say that people are playing for money? Well the class prize system has done a ^{peculiar} thing for chess, especially big tournaments such as this. The fondest dream of the fellow who wins one fifth of a third D prize is to take home his ~~check~~ check for \$5.33, show it to his wife and say "Look honey, I'm a professional chess player"!

For the true professionals in chess it's a struggle. One of these, John "Jack" Peters, won a thousand dollars, a fine trophy and the clear title of American Open Champion. Peters is trying to make a living with a combination of chess lessons, writing, and tournament play. He has recently been in a terrible slump and has had to get by on his lessons and writing. It was heart warming to see him play up to his full potential, which he has not done since Lone Pine of 1977 when he shared the lead going into the second or last round. Peters could be described as an all around chess master. He has a deep positional understanding of chess but he loves a good fight. His tactics are often sharp and challenging. He fears no one over the chess board, certainly not grand masters of whom he has beaten at least seven within the last two years. It might also be mentioned that

he is a first rate chess teacher, the finest that I have ever come into contact with personally, because he has an ability to communicate his knowledge to almost any level of player.

Peters richly deserved his title. At the beginning of the tournament, he was ranked fourth with a rating of 2447. Ahead of him were three grand masters, Walter Browne, Larry Christiansen, and Anatoly Lein. In the last three rounds, Peters disposed of Browne and Christiansen and then held Lein to a draw. Two and a half out of three against the top three players in a tournament makes for a well-deserved victory. The games were all sharp and interesting. The Browne game was especially intriguing to the spectators as it appeared that Peters had simply lost a piece with no compensation and it was not apparent for many moves after this what a fantastic position he had. Jack concedes that Lein probably had a win in the last round but the Los Angeles master demonstrated his tenacious fighting spirit by hanging on to the draw which clinched the title. The only other draw which Peters yielded was to master-expert Bill Batchelder in round four.

As you may have noticed, I mentioned that someone tied with Peters for first place. Now I do not ~~need~~^{MEAN} to disparage any chess player and the person who tied, Cicero Braga, a 19 year old student from Brazil is well known as a fine player. But if there has ever been an example of the luck of the Swiss, this certainly was it. In the first round Braga lost a game to a player named Garza whose rating was 18,98. He then proceeded to win 7 consecutive games and in the course of those seven games he played only one player with a master rating, Ray Martin, who dropped out of the tournament with a point and a half after four rounds. While Peters was fighting with grandmasters, Cicero was disposing of experts. Yet he too was awarded

\$1,000. I again emphasize that this critique is not directed at the player but simply points up the vagaries of/the only possible pairing system which would allow this kind of tournament to take place, *THE SWISS SYSTEM*.

What happened to the Miramar in Santa Monica? Well, apparently they got tired of chess players and decided that this year there would be no tournaments there. We are assured by the Santa Monica Bay Chess Club, which sponsored this event that the tournament will return to the Miramar next year as this hotel is now under new ownership.

Before discussing the other prize winners, it might be a good idea to give a word of praise to the Santa Monica Bay Chess Club. This club, which meets on Mondays and ~~Wednesdays~~ *FRIDAYS*, in the Senior Citizens Recreation Center, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, is one of the finest and most enterprising clubs in America. They were able, under the fine leadership of Gordon Brooks to raise \$1,000 in order to take out a \$24,000 two page advertising supplement in the Los Angeles Times which has a circulation of over 600,000. ~~point~~. The other \$23,000 was taken up by a combination of chess equipment promoters, the Soviet National Exhibition and other sponsors which showed an interest in chess. This is the most ambitious advertising ~~that has~~ ever ~~been~~ done for a major chess tournament and it certainly showed in the rather large number of new United States Chess Federation memberships which were acquired. Altogether, there were 55 new memberships, and 10 renewals of memberships which had been lapsed for more than 6 months. There were also an unusually large number of spectators at the tournament, *WHO PAID A SMALL FEE (NEW #)* There were actually 2 computers at the tournament one of which competed and made only 2 points. The other, which also plays backgammon and other games, was manned in the lobby of the Hilton and took on all comers. It has a color television screen

with the chess board appearing in bright green and red. I believe it sells for \$112,000. Interested Neiman-Marcus?

In the open section, except for the first two prizes, form ~~showed~~ ^{HELP} up pretty well. The three grand masters each scored six and a half and received \$275. Also in that group was young Nick Defirmian who lost a game to Larry Christiansen in round 6 which no one could believe. Def. was two pawns ahead in the queens ending and carelessly allowed an exchange of queens into a lost king and pawn ending. He was pretty discouraged by the time he played me in round seven but soon got well. He beat Perry Youngworth in the last round in a really nice game.

Old Carl Pillick, a long time New York and California master with the most beautiful head of silver hair ~~that~~ I have ever seen, managed to collect \$400 ^{TOP EXPERT MONEY} with his six and a half points as he is temporarily rated as an expert. He defeated Alan Pollard in a sharp tactical game in the last round. Pollard, the holder of a ~~2450~~ 2395 fide rating had drawn with grand masters Browne and Lein in earlier rounds. The masters with six each received \$33.33, alas, \$1.69 less than their entry fee. For the record, Walt Cunningham of Gainesville Florida, now a professor of psychology at the University of Florida, played in his first national tournament in three years and acquitted himself quite well. Jeff Kent, who recently passed the bar and is now a practicing attorney in Los Angeles also had six and was undefeated. Cunningham actually lost a game to the surprise ^{PLAYER} of the tournament, ^{EXPERT} Ron Frasco, who had a great tournament until he ran into Mr. Braga in the last round and allowed him to tie for first. The other master with six was Rubins Filguth, a tall bespectacled red-haired Brazilian who has recently been

experiencing a good deal of success in Southern California. Filguth played on the Brazilian student team and made 75% in 1976. He is only about 22.

There were six experts who tied ^{for 2nd & 3rd EXPERT MONEY} with six points and each received \$58.33. Paul Kaploy, ^{CRAIG} ~~Craig~~ Barnes, Tom Dorsch, Curtis Carlson, Enrique Canejo, (Peters beat Canejo in round three in a particularly nice queen and pawn ending) and the above mentioned young Ron Frasco who had a particularly nice tournament until the last round.

The A prize was shared by Russ Wada, a 16 year old Los Angeles high school student who is now clearly of master strength, having played an incredible schedule to make his five ^{+ ONE HALF + TOOK THE TROPHY} points, Della Garza who defeated Braga in the first round, and former master, now A player Jeff Stone who absolutely annihilated this reporter in the last round. In fact the defeat was so horrible that I think I will now stick to reporting rather than playing chess. Each of the three ^{who were A} five and a halfs/players received a substantial \$233.33.

There were four people tied for the below 1800 prize in the open section. They were D, Aliso, Rich Reid, Steve Wagner, and Steve Ramos. Diane Savereide, tied with Linda ^{MAHAN} ~~Maighan~~ with four points for the top woman in the open. Diane didn't stay long enough to get her trophy and when Linda refused it because she didn't feel she played very well, the trophy went, by default, to sweet little Chris Hendrickson from Boulder Colorado who clasped it to her bosom with great enthusiasm. ^{CHRIS STARTED OF 0-4 BUT CAME BACK WITH 3 1/2}

The ^{BOOSTER} ~~open~~ section, which started with 352, players was won by Joseph Torquato, a 16 year old high school student from Riverside California, ^{WHO SCORED 7 STRAIGHT WINS + A DRAW IN R. 8.} The winners of this open section have almost always gone on to become experts and masters. Seeing that young Joseph is from Riverside, which could be called the cradle of California masters,

having produced 7 or 8 over the last ten years, this victory was not unexpected.

The tournament was directed by Ben Neathercott, who is presently awaiting certification as a national tournament director. Phil Chase did a remarkably fine job in handling the booster section which had 150 more players. The direction was, for the most part, quite acceptable.

Earlier, I facetiously answered the question as to why 550 people would give up their Thanksgiving dinner to play chess. Of course, we know it's not the money. There is a peculiar fascination in this game which cannot be explained in any rational or ~~clear~~ ^{LOGICAL} manner. It has something to do with the nature of obsession. All of us who play tournament chess share this ^{MADNESS} and it is pretty difficult to convey the nature of this obsession to non-afficionados.

Jerry Hank
12-77