

December 9, 1949

Mr. Harry McCleary
Houston Chronicle
512-20 Travis Street
Houston 2, Texas

Dear Mr. McCleary:

I shall be happy to give you a few details on how we organized the Chess Festival staged in San Francisco on Sunday, December 4.

First of all let me point out that the entire festival was built around one personality -- George Koltanowski -- who is a most unusual individual in that he possesses a phenomenal memory. Koltanowski is, as you probably know, the world's blindfold chess champion, which means that he plays chess without the benefit of a board and calls his and his opponent's move by square only. To achieve his title he played 35 simultaneous games in Scotland some years ago, and the title has never been approached by any other chess player.

In the chess festival, Koltanowski took on all comers for a twelve-hour period, keeping 37 games going at once. As soon as one person dropped out another person took over that spot. He completed 271 games, winning 251, losing 3 and drawing 17.

In answer to your specific questions:

1. The festival ran from 10 AM to 10 PM. Sunday was chosen because that would allow people from distant spots to participate.

2. The events are listed on the enclosed program.

3. The cost was nominal. Out-of-pocket costs to The Chronicle was only \$90.00 (\$75.00 for hall rental; \$10.00 for PA system rental; and \$5.00 for a stand-by wheel-chair -- promotional gimmick.) The other costs -- printing, signs, time devoted to promotion -- were all absorbed by our regular Special Services Office staff. We do not consider these as costs as it is our job to handle events of this nature.

4. The local chess clubs did much to put across the festival, and without them it would have been a near impossibility. Judges, scorekeepers, the other simultaneous exhibition games and the novelty games were all performed by master chess players here in the Bay Area. Their time and expenses were all donated in the effort to put across the festival.

5. Promotion from the newspaper's standpoint was handled in two ways: Koltanowski made almost daily mention of the festival in his chess column. In addition, we carried display boxes in news space telling about the coming event, plus three

or four feature stories, all this over a four-weeks period of time.

Two types of tickets were printed. One, a spectator ticket which was distributed to the public free (they wrote in for the tickets.) The second, the participant's ticket, was sold for \$1.00. This money was used to defray production expenses and the balance was for Mr. Koltanowski. By handling tickets through the mail we could tell in advance just how many people to plan for. In a project of this sort, I feel this is an absolute necessity.

On the participants ticket we assigned an hour for the individual to play. Obviously, in handling so many people it was necessary to spread them over the day.

This letter, the program and the tear sheets should pretty well answer your inquiry. If, however, there is anything more you would like to know, by all means drop me a line and I will be happy to pass on the information.

The name George Koltanowski is synonymous with chess in the United States, and I am certain that if you talk with your local chess club his name will be known there. Koltanowski's life, love and income are all derived from chess, and he is prepared to do almost anything economically feasible to further interest in the game. If his expenses could be met and his time made worth-while (and I don't mean any exorbitant fee) I am certain that he would assist in setting up a similar exhibit for you people.

Sincerely,

Dave Ohman
Special Services