

Treasured Traditions

Chess Educator of the Year: Elizabeth Shaughnessy

By Dr. Alexey Root, WIM



ONE OF THE TREASURES OF THE University of Texas at Dallas is its chess program. McDermott Library's "Treasures @ UT Dallas," available via the unique collections link on the library's website <http://libtreasures.utdallas.edu/xmlui>, features the official archives of the Chess Program. The Chess Program and the McDermott Library also collaborate annually on ChessFest. During ChessFest, the 2011 Chess Educator of the Year Elizabeth Shaughnessy spoke about "The Importance of Chess in the American Community Today." Several of my Chess Online students attended her speech. Chess Online student International Master Julio Sadorra said, "As someone who likes to teach chess a lot, I look forward to the Chess Educator event. I always expect to find chess wisdom and ideas on chess pedagogy and I was not disappointed."

Berkeley Chess School and Title I

Elizabeth Shaughnessy is president of the Berkeley Chess School, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Founded in 1982, in 2010-2011 its instructors will teach approximately 5,000 K-12 students in over 140 schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. In most schools served by the Berkeley Chess School, parents bear the costs of chess. But Elizabeth Shaughnessy also wanted to reach students in Title I (Title One) schools. As Shaugh-



Blindfold Chess and Endgame Problems

The tenth annual University of Texas at Dallas ChessFest featured the debut of a life-size wooden chess set at UT Dallas' Chess Plaza. The brown (white) and black (black) chessmen grabbed the attention of students and faculty. A freshman student sent her parents a cell-phone photo, saying, "I told them UT Dallas was a chess school. Now they have photographic proof." GM Cristian Chirila, seated in a chair with his back to the chessmen, played IM Julio Sadorra, colorfully blindfolded and cross-legged on the ground. After their draw, Sadorra snagged the chair. Still blindfolded, he defeated a (sighted) team of three spectators. Then Sadorra and Artur Safin taught the Reti endgame problem from 1921. In that problem, White has a king on h8 and a pawn on c6 and Black has a king on a6 and a pawn on h5. It's White to move and draw. Chess Program Director James Stallings concluded the outdoor festivities by challenging spectators to find the mate in eight from the "Kuwait Immortal" problem. A solution and the problem's history is in Tim Krabbé's Chess Curiosities <http://www.xs4all.nl/~timkr/chess2/kuwait.htm>.

nessy said, "Some Title One schools don't even offer P.E. These children have no enrichment in their school lives. Maybe that's why chess is so special to them." To qualify as a Title I school, 40% or more of the school's students must come from low-income families. The Berkeley Chess School has taught chess classes in schools where over 90% of the children qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Shaughnessy has secured donations from companies and foundations to pay for chess in Title I schools. To show

donors that their dollars make a difference, the Berkeley Chess School partnered with independent research institutes to assess the educational impact of its chess classes. Classes were randomly assigned to either receive chess instruction for one hour a week or to not get any special treatment for that hour. In a study conducted in five Title I schools in Oakland, some students got 20 weeks (20 hours) of chess over the school year. Students who had chess instruction significantly outperformed students who did

not get weekly chess instruction on California's standardized tests.

These significant results are from students who didn't choose chess. Chess Online student FIDE Master Tyler Hughes said, "I had some mixed feelings about students not choosing to be in the school-day chess classes. It seems like having students who haven't chosen chess could make it difficult for those who are interested. Apparently, though, the students enjoy playing chess even if they didn't originally elect to participate. Additionally,

Shaughnessy mentioned that this policy includes more girls who otherwise might not have participated.”

The Berkeley Chess School's after-school chess programs are self-selected by students. Shaughnessy said that gifted children are often bored in schools. According to a 2007 *Time* magazine article cited by Shaughnessy, 20% of high school dropouts have tested as gifted. Chess provides a forum where all students can be appropriately challenged, which may be especially appreciated by gifted students. She said, “You wouldn't pair a 1000-rated child with a 500-rated child over and over because the 1000-rated child would get bored. In school, gifted children are asked to repeatedly perform tasks below their abilities or are used as tutors for other children. In chess, it's easy to meet the needs of gifted children. If you have a 1000-rated child, you pair him or her with another 1000-rated player.” On Friday nights, Berkeley Chess School provides six different rating groups for children and an adult tournament. Talented chess children, such as a seven-year-old national champion, play in the adult tournament.

Shaughnessy stressed the importance of expectations in chess education. In one of her instructor's chess classes, kindergartners were playing blindfold chess “because no one told them that it was hard and that they couldn't do it.” She also said that parental expectations tend to differ for girls and boys, with negative effects for both. Shaughnessy said, “Dads of the female chessplayers, while waiting for their daughters to finish games, say to each other, ‘I'm proud that she's playing.’ The dads didn't have expectations of their daughters winning and, therefore, the girls often didn't expect to win themselves. In contrast, the dads of the male players often conducted pre- and post-game coaching sessions with their sons. They expected their sons to win. The sons felt these expectations and won many games. But some of them quit because of the pressure.”

Berkeley Chess School alumni include one FIDE master, one international master, and two grandmasters. GM Jon Ludvig Hammer learned chess at the Berkeley Chess School. He became the School's first alumnus grandmaster. A January posting on the Berkeley Chess School's website stated, “Congratulations to BCS Alumnus and 2010 BCS Master Class Instructor Sam Shankland for winning his final Grandmaster norm at the Berkeley International in January 2011!” Not only did Shankland study chess at Berkeley Chess School, his final norm was at a tournament held at its headquarters. For more information about the Berkeley Chess School, go to www.berkeleychessschool.org.

Shaughnessy, the chess player

Elizabeth Shaughnessy, then Elizabeth O'Shaughnessy, learned chess at home in Dublin, Ireland. A Lithuanian ambassador took shelter in her family's home for 18 months during World War II. The ambassador played nightly chess games with O'Shaughnessy's father, with mistakes taken back so that better, more beautiful moves could be played. It wasn't until O'Shaughnessy played competitively on her college chess team that she realized taking back moves wasn't the standard in chess. After graduating as an architect, she went to Tito's Yugoslavia to build the “New Belgrade” alongside Belgrade's existing historical buildings. It seemed that everyone knew chess in Yugoslavia, so O'Shaughnessy had plenty of chances to play. She competed for the Irish team in the Women's Chess Olympiad in Poland in 1969. O'Shaughnessy became Irish women's chess champion in 1970. In 1971, she met an American, married him within a year, and took his last name, Shaughnessy. The couple settled in Berkeley and she kept busy with three young children. Shaughnessy returned to chess when her son's elementary school asked parents to share their hobbies and expertise. She taught chess and soon was asked to teach at other schools in the area.

Shaughnessy has served on numerous boards, including CalChess, USCF, and the Berkeley Unified School District School Board. But she's also known on the chessboard, having represented Ireland in several chess Olympiads including the most recent one (2010).

Here is one of Shaughnessy's favorite chess games, from round six of the Bled Olympiad in 2002:

Albin Counter Gambit (D08)

Nadhmia Othman, Yemen

Elizabeth Shaughnessy, Ireland

Annotated by Roger Poehlmann and Shaughnessy

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e5

White could have avoided this gambit by playing 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. c4, but then would be without some of the sharper options in the Queen's Gambit, like 2. c4 dxc4 3. e4 and the Exchange Variation with Nge2 in the Queen's Gambit Declined.

3. dxe5 d4 4. a3

Avoiding the trap 4. e3 Bb4+ 5. Bd2 dxe3 6. Bxb4 exf2+ 7. Ke2 fxg1=N+.

4. ... Nc6

With ... Bb4+ ruled out and White intending b4, 4. ... c5 5. e3 Nc6 should be considered.

5. Nf3

5. e3 would give White's early a3 independence significance, but no advantage: 5. e3 Nge7 6. Nf3 Bg4 7. Be2 Nf5 8. Nxd4 (8. e4 d3 Tot-Petrovic, Yugoslavia 1967) 8. ... Bxe2 9. Qxe2 Nfxd4 10. exd4 Nxd4 11. Qd1.

5. ... a5

5. ... Bg4 6. Nbd2 Qe7 7. h3 is the more popular continuation, but 5. ... f6 has also been played. 5. ... f6 6. exf6 Nxf6 7. g3 Bg4 (7. ... Be6 was unsuccessful in Jiretorn-Shaughnessy, Elista (ol) 1998) 8. Bg2 a5 9. 0-0 Bc5.

6. e3 Bg4 7. exd4 Bxf3 8. gxf3

A little better is 8. Qxf3 Nxd4 9. Qd1 Bc5 10. Nc3 Qh4 11. Be3 0-0-0.

8. ... Nxd4

If Black plays 8. ... Qxd4 9. Qb3 Qxe5+ 10. Be3 0-0-0 it is equal.

9. Bh3

It is too ambitious for White to leave pieces unprotected with so many pawn weaknesses; 9. Nc3 or 9. Bg2 intending castling was better and White is a tempo up on the lines analyzed below.

9. ... Ne7

Black ensures that there will be a knight on d4 for the foreseeable future. 9. ... Qh4 first is also good for Black.

10. Be3 Nec6 11. f4 Bc5 12. Nc3

This natural move is surprisingly the critical mistake.

Better is 12. 0-0 Qh4 13. Bg2 0-0-0 14. Nd2 g5 or 12. Bg2 Ne6 (Also good is 12. ... Qh4 13. Bxc6+ bxc6 14. Bxd4 Rd8 15. Bxc5 Rxd1+ 16. Kxd1) 13. 0-0 Qh4 14. Bxc6+ bxc6 15. Qf3 0-0.

12. ... Qh4 13. Bg2

Black takes advantage after 13. Bf1 Nc2+ 14. Qxc2 Bxe3 15. Rd1 Bxf4 16. Qe4 0-0 17. Be2 Rae8 or 13. Bxd4 Nxd4 14. Bg2 Qxf4 15. 0-0.

13. ... Nc2+ 14. Qxc2 Bxe3 15. Nd5

Black also shines with 15. Bxc6+ bxc6 16. Rd1 0-0 17. Qe2 Bxf4 18. Rd4 Rad8 19. Re4 Rfe8.

15. ... Nd4 16. Qd3 Qxf2+ 17. Kd1 Qxg2 18. Re1

Allowing a nice finish.

18. ... Qf3+ 19. Re2 Qf1+ 20. Re1 Qxd3 mate. ■

The 2011 North American Youth Championships will be held from June 25-29, 2011, sponsored by Chess Educators. See www.chesseducators.com/northamericanyouth/ for more information.