

Organize a Chess Club

by Jonathan Berry

After trying to get other people to write this article for four years, I've given up. Therein the first rule of chess organization: "If you want something done, do it yourself." So please bear with me.

One Foot in Front of the Other

To walk, you must put one foot in front of the other. This basic fact is often lost on chess players who like to foresee the destiny of the Universe before they take that first step. You must plan, but most of the operation of a chess club is just getting things done.

The Wasteland

If you don't know any other chess players in town, you might save yourself time and effort by enquiring, say, at the local library or newspaper about whether there is a local chess club.

If you don't find a chess club or it's inconvenient, the time has arrived to start your own.

One approach is to take out a small ad. in the local paper: "Play chess? New club forming, phone Mick at 555-0000."

You would start with a meeting at your house one night a week, and later rotate the meetings between the houses of other members. This can be good if facilities (space, lighting, ventilation, and lack of noise) are adequate, spouses do not object, and the numbers are right. Numbers: if you have too many members they won't fit into a standard room. If you have too few, your club, due to the inevitable dropouts, might not be able to keep going.

A more ambitious way to start a chess club is to approach a local community centre or library. Make an appointment with whoever is in charge. Here is where a little preparation will pay off. Have something in writing--the person in charge will probably have to get approval from someone else. Here's an example:

Plan for Bishop's Falls Chess Club

- To meet one night per week (Monday, Wednesday, or Thursday) from 7:00 to closing time.
- Initially, no fee will be charged, players will bring their own chess equipment. Later the club will, charge a fee, and leave it stored at the Community Hall.
- Regular schedule of activities for the first year:

September	Informal play			
	Informal play, elections			
	Informal play, registration			
	Fall Tournament, round			1
October	"	"	"	2
	"	"	"	3
	Fall Tournament, round			4
	"	"	"	5
November	"	"	"	6
	Informal play			
	Consultation tournament			
	Speed chess			
December	Informal play			
	Novelty night			
	Informal play			
	Closed - Christmas break			
January	Closed - New Year's Break			
	Instruction for beginners			
	Informal play			
	Exhibition by visiting master			
	Consultation tournament			
February	Informal play & registration			
	Club Championship, Round 1			
	"	"	"	2
March	"	"	"	3
	"	"	"	4
	"	"	"	5
	"	"	"	6
	Informal play			
April	Speed chess & registration			
	Selected Openings event Round 1			
	"	"	"	2
	"	"	"	3

May " " " " 4

Informal play

Consultation tournament

Picnic & Club Closing.

This plan does not bind you to hold all the events listed or to shut the club down in May. It gives you a useful starting point and convinces the guys in charge that you have at least some of your marbles. You have given them a varied schedule of activities that will appeal not only to hard-core chess addicts, but will provide a service to the community.

The object of this work will be to get a free room for your chess club. It might be impossible to get a free room at certain locations. Don't worry. Be prepared by making several copies of your proposal. If you can't make a deal, it's easy to try someplace else. Your prospective club members will probably have to buy a membership card in the Community Centre, but that is a small fraction of the going rates for room rental.

There will be other activities to compete for space with your new chess club. The established activities will, of course, have the first choice of space. Don't try to bully your way to a big room. It will turn out that another activity has a big room and few people. If you're overcrowded, you can probably arrange an exchange later. But right now the chess club has only one member, and the guys in charge probably think there might be 5 or 6 if you're lucky. Most chess clubs turn out a surprise to the guys in charge.

To Every Thing, There is a Season

The best time to start a club is in September, when people are committing their time for winter activities. But don't wait until September to approach the community centre. That'll be too late. Better try May or June—before schedules are finalized and printed.

It Takes Two to Play Chess

Now, you have a place to play. You need to get others to show up. You need to advertise. The community centre will probably help you. Why not? They've given you the room space, now they have to sell membership cards.

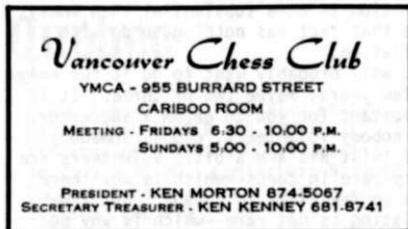
I don't think there has been much investigation of this matter, but it must make a difference how you advertise your meetings, especially the first. The local community centre wanted somebody to start a chess club, so they advertised in their pamphlet, which reaches about 30,000 people, something like "Chess club, Registration 8:00 pm. Bring your pieces and

boards". Four people showed up, including three who went to see how many people would show up. On the other side of town, a library advertised something like "Chess Lessons, for all players from Beginners to Class A", and 30 people showed up for the Monday sessions, another 40 for the Wednesday sessions. So, advertise your chess club as chess lessons.' Experience is the best teacher, after all. Of course, you will have to be prepared to teach the moves to beginners, but it's a small effort to make for all those potential members.

The "What's Happening" column in the newspaper and public service announcements on Radio and Cablevision will often give you free advertising. Remember to keep it short: "The Chess Club will meet at Bishop's Community Centre Thursday evening at 7:00 pm. Bring your chess set."

A long message will be thrown in the garbage.

The Business Card is an easy way to advertise, and cheap, too.



These cards can be given to all known chess players, posted on the bulletin boards of libraries, laundromats, community centres, at work, etc etc.

Hors d'Oeuvres

A club meeting isn't going to attract much interest in the media, and not everyone listens to public service announcements. You'll need a special event to attract people who weren't looking for a chess club when they found you. The following events have some media interest (blindfold) simultaneous exhibitions, chess marathons, an open weekend tournament, living chess, and, to a lesser extent, chess lectures.

Short announcements of these events will still be run by your free advertisers. But try a longer "Press Release" to get the local media to run feature stories. Here's another fictitious example:

They Shoot Knights, Don't They?

"Big" George Burne and Ted "Tex" Tinkle- man will fight it out to the finish next Saturday June 3rd at the Northgatepark shore Shopping Centre, starting 9:00 am. Under strict medical supervision, the two will fight it out with chess pieces over a chess board until one of them drops.

At the weigh-in Burne, Bishop's Falls postal chess champion, said: "Tex is so weak I could cut him down with the dull edge of a post card."

Tinkleman merely smiled and said: "We'll see."

The winner of the contest will be the first to establish a 100-game lead, or, failing that, the player who lasts the longest.

John Smith, president of the Bishop's Falls Chess Club, said: "The people at the mall have guaranteed to keep the place open as long as necessary, but I don't think it'll take more than 3 days. A man can only take so much beating." The Bishop's Fall Chess Club meets every Thursday night at 7pm at the Community Centre. Oh yes, the meetings end at 10:30 sharp.

"30"

Contact: Mick Mousely at 555-0000

The above should be typed double-spaced and sent to your local media. You don't need to go to such extremes as I did, but the event has to be special and have some human interest. A simultaneous exhibition, properly advertised, will always attract more chess players than you ever thought existed. You'll get further free advertising when the event is reported on the evening news....

Be Known

Take a look at the ads in your local newspaper. All the big companies always use the same style of type and the same logo for their names. This makes for "customer identification". You can do the same. Design a logo (the CFC crest above is a logo), and put it on everything that comes from or belongs to your club. We at the CFC will design a logo at no charge for any Canadian chess organization (including chess clubs).



Equipment and Supplies

All community centres have 6- or 8- foot banquet tables and chairs. The other things you'll need are: pieces, boards, clocks, scoresheets, pairing sheets, posting sheets, sealed move

envelopes (optional), maybe a demonstration board. All are available from the Chess Federation of Canada, ~~Box 7339, Ottawa, Ont K1L 8E4~~. Write for a free catalogue.

Chess clocks can be a problem in that they are expensive and are often stolen. The CFC has applied to the Federal Government to have the 25% tariff on chess clocks removed, so that would lower the price considerably. To discourage stealing, you can use a system where somebody who signs out a clock must give a piece of identification to the person who is in charge of the club equipment. That's fine, but usually too much trouble. Try attaching your clocks to pieces of wood. For example, a BHB clock could be attached (using, for example wood screws and/or contact cement) to a piece of wood 4"x16". This not only makes it difficult to put the clock in a coat pocket, but helps prevent clocks from being knocked over or dropped on the floor during time scrambles — greater stability.

Price of Admission

No matter how low your membership fees are, there will always be people who complain they are too high. Charge a fair fee, one that will cover your expenses even if the membership is low. You can always give special consideration to hardship cases. Traditionally, club dues are collected yearly. Many clubs, however, have gone over to a nightly fee. Where some people resist or are even unable to pay a \$20 per year club membership fee, very few will have problems with a 75¢ or \$1 nightly fee. Can you imagine how many Arcades would go broke if they charged \$30 in advance for 3 pinball games per week for a year?

Paperwork

If you want, you can go to a lot of trouble with the paperwork for your club. You can incorporate it with your provincial government, you can open a business account at the local bank -- an account requiring two signatures, you can get a club telephone. But these require time and effort and are worthwhile only for the largest clubs. If you can do it, better is to elect as Treasurer somebody who is a long-time resident of the community (preferably somebody to whom the cash assets of the chess club--maybe \$200 --would not be a temptation). Money collected would be given to the Treasurer

with a slip saying what the money was for. For example, \$18 might be accompanied by a slip: "\$18--Nightly dues. October 29, 1980." Any disbursements could be made by the Treasurer either in cash or by cheque from his personal account. The Treasurer should be an active member of the club, so that people can find him to give him the money. The only other person who need handle money is the membership secretary, who collects the nightly and/or annual

dues, and issues membership cards or gives stubs to the nightly dues players. The Tournament Director directs the tournaments or convinces somebody else to. The President is responsible for the general operation of the club, with a strong voice in everything that goes on. I think most clubs will find four officers—President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Tournament Director—sufficient.

To CFC or Not to CFC?

Some clubs require all their members to be CFC members also. Some require CFC only for their rated tournaments. Some do not hold rated tournaments. You don't expect a CFC article to tell you not to encourage CFC membership? Well, you're right. Compulsory CFC membership gives each member a copy of the magazine every two months. The magazine sustains interest when it would otherwise lag; it's a reminder. Ratings become important to the player and he is therefore more likely to take part in tournaments. Further, *Chess Canada Echecs* contains organizational articles (like this one). Players might read them and learn how to organize and maybe take some of the strain off **you**. Finally, membership leaves the player with a strong link with organized chess even if the club fails. On the negative side is the money it costs to join the CFC. You just have to balance the pros and cons yourself.

Why?

Why organize a chess club? Because you want a club in your area and because somebody has to organize it. It can be hard work, and frustrating, but it has its rewards, not money, but creation. Creation is more substantial than money, and that fact has nothing to do with inflation!

You will probably want to do it for only a few years, maybe two or three. It is important for you to groom a successor. If nobody volunteers, choose somebody and twist his arm a bit. Volunteers are very rare in chess—which is why there are so few clubs in Canada. But arm-twisting is not rare—which is why so many of them survive for so long.

Remember the Golden Rule

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" applies equally to chess club organizers and strangers to the club. Think about it.