

Scarborough Community of Toronto
Chess News & Views

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“ FRIENDLY Chess Since 1960 ”

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO BOTH MEMBERS & NON-MEMBERS

Issue # 3 – October 1, 2001

Do You Know ? / Savez-Vous ?

Should the Girls' Canadian Youth Chess Championships Be Abolished ?? (Pt. 1)

Introduction

Canada, through the CFC, holds two parallel tournaments for “ Youth “ (Under 18, 16, 14, 12 & 10 years of age). One is the mixed gender “ Canadian Youth Chess Championships (CYCC) “, and the other is the separate girls only tournament, the “ Girls' Canadian Youth Chess Championships (Girls' CYCC) “ [there was an executive motion a while ago that entitled girls to play in the CYCC (“ Boys “). We have been unable to review the exact motion. Our source for this is the past CFC Junior Coordinator, and current special officer on the CFC, Joshua Keshet. He was quoted on this on a recent ChessTalk posting, and the statement was never contradicted.]

There has been in Canada, and other countries, a raging debate on the value of holding “ separate “ girls only tournaments – are they a good thing for girl players, or a bad thing ? Are they fair to boy players ?

Some have, quite recently, suggested that we should simply abolish the Girls' CYCC, and just have the one mixed gender CYCC tournament that we already have. Why hold an extra parallel tournament for girls, especially when they can play in the CYCC if they so choose ?

The Motion

To make this easier to digest, and to look at what is entailed in such a proposal, we have devised a fictitious “ motion “, which we will treat “ as if “ it was going before the CFC Governors for decision in the next CFC Governors' Letter. This is a technique we used successfully in our last Issue, when we dealt with a proposal to abolish the 2002 Canadian Women's Closed Championship. It suits this topic nicely as well.

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Here is the “ motion “ under discussion :

A) that the CFC abolish the intended 2002 Girls’ Canadian Youth Chess Championships in Montreal next year;

B) that next year, there will only be the 2002 CYCC (mixed – boys and girls);

C) that the highest finishing player (boy or girl) in each section will be the 2002 Canadian Youth Chess Champion, and represent Canada at the mixed FIDE World Youth Chess Championships (WYCC) [this is currently the case], subject to the following :

i) if the winner is a girl, she has the option of representing Canada at the FIDE WYCC or at the FIDE Girls’ World Youth Chess Championships (Girls’ WYCC); if she decides to go to the Girls’ WYCC, then the second-finishing player (boy or girl) will be able to represent Canada at the WYCC;

ii) if the winner is a girl, and she decides to play in the WYCC, then the next top-finishing girl will be able to represent Canada at the Girls’ WYCC;

iii) if the winner is a boy, the top-finishing girl will be able to represent Canada at the Girls’ WYCC

For the purpose of the debate on this “ motion “ the issue of funding will not arise. We will assume that CFC will continue to pay the travel expenses of the rep. to the WYCC and the Girls’ WYCC (in fact, we intend to explore this very separate issue of “ funding “ in a future Issue of the newsletter).

At the heart of the motion, we feel, is the question of whether separate girl-only tournaments promote equality, or work against equality. Do they have a valid purpose ?

The Current CFC Situation

CYCC (Mixed)

In each of the provinces/territories “ qualifying tournaments “ are held to determine “ official “ provincial/territorial reps. to go to the CYCC. Girls and boys can play in the CYCC Qualifiers. In Ontario last year, the Ontario Chess Association paid the entry fee to the national CYCC for the first place finisher in the Ontario Qualifiers.

The CFC holds the CYCC just prior to, and in the same place as, the Canadian Open. Other youth can also play in the national CYCC by paying the registration fee (in some years, there has been a low-rating cut-off).

CFC pays the travel cost of the winner of each CYCC section to the FIDE WYCC. The FIDE tournament for 2001 is being held this October in Spain. Our representatives were chosen in the 2001 CYCC held this July, before the 2001 Canadian Open, in Sackville, New Brunswick.

CFC does not pay anything to the second or third place finishers in the CYCC (Canada can send three reps. to the FIDE Championship).

Girls' CYCC

At the same time, the CFC also holds a parallel tournament for girls only – the Girls' CYCC. Girls can choose whether they wish to play in the CYCC or the Girls' CYCC. Qualifying tournaments are held for it in the same way as for the CYCC, and at the same time. The OCA also pays the entry fee to the national for each section-winning girl in the Ontario Girls' CYCC Qualifiers.

The national Girls' CYCC is also played at the same time as the CYCC, just prior to the Canadian Open. As well, CFC pays the travel expense for the top girl in the Girls' CYCC, to the FIDE Girls' WYCC. The FIDE Girls' WYCC tournament is held at the same time as the WYCC.

CFC does not pay anything for the second-place or third-place finishers in the Girls' CYCC either (Canada can send 3 official reps.).

Girls Must Choose

Under the current system, a girl must choose which tournament she wishes to play in. This becomes a difficult choice when a girl is near the top of her age group in terms of chess strength. It may be that she is substantially stronger than the other girls in her age group. And so it is expected that she will win if she enters the Girls CYCC. But the level of opposition for her will not be challenging.

She may wish to face strong opposition, and to try to prove that she can beat, not only other girls her age, but also other boys ! She may wish to try to represent Canada at the WYCC, instead of the Girls' WYCC ! But there is a difficulty in choosing to go into the CYCC. If she does not win, she cannot represent Canada at the Girls' WYCC, even if it is acknowledged that she is definitely stronger than the girl who eventually won the Girls' CYCC ! If a girl wants to represent Canada in the Girls' WYCC, then she must go into the Girls' CYCC. This is how the system currently works, (though in fact few girls have actually chosen to enter the CYCC).

The proposed motion will change this, by only forcing a girl to choose AFTER she has WON the CYCC.

If It Appears Simple, It's Likely Not !

The above aphorism seems most appropriate to this apparently straight-forward motion. Unfortunately, more is at stake than just getting rid of one tournament. When one starts to go into the pros and cons of this motion, general life issues start to raise their heads. Are a child's characteristics genetically created or environmentally created ? And which are which ? What is the reality of the interplay between current " boys culture " and " girls culture ", if there is such a distinction ? Is chess an area of society where affirmative action is required to redress historical discrimination against women ? Are girl chess players being coddled, and only challenged to rise to the level of mediocrity ?

We are therefore going to discuss this motion by looking at various arguments on one side or the other, over this and the next few Issues.

Getting Started

To help us analyze the arguments rolled into this “ motion “, we decided first to try and find out what Canadian girls wanted. So we approached an active GTA girl player and her family– Alina Sviridovitch and her parents, Svetlana and Slava. Alina is currently ranked # 1 in Canada in the Girls’ U 10 year old age group, for this year. She is # 3 in the top Can. Youth U 10 (mixed) list. We asked them all to consider the motion, and give us their thoughts on this topic. We have framed their ideas as a submission on the motion to get us started.

We Abstain on the Motion ! – Sviridovitch Family

For Alina and her family, the issue of whether the Girls’ CYCC was maintained was not the central issue. It was rather the issue of playing strength improvement. They commented :

“ There is no difference between boys and girls playing chess. And it does not matter what the sex of your opponent is, male or female; you will do well if you are really good at chess. One of the brightest examples of this is Judit Polgar, who plays only in mixed (“ men’s) tournaments, and she is in the top 20 by rating in the world. Alina has played both women and men, sometimes much older than she is, and been very successful.

As parents of chess playing children, who show good ability, we all dream about our youngster becoming World Champion ! To do this they must play strong opponents. If the mixed tournaments are stronger than available girl-only tournaments, then Alina definitely chooses to play in the mixed tournaments, and we agree with her. “

“ CYCC Only “ Argument # 1 – “ Playing Strength Improvement “

In their comments, the Sviridovitch family has hit on one of the key arguments used against there being a separate girls-only Girls’ CYCC. But for them, it is not an argument that necessarily leads to eliminating the Girls’ CYCC as an option. It is rather an argument as to why a girl should choose the CYCC over the Girls’ CYCC; they take no position on whether the Girls’ CYCC should in fact be eliminated.

But others see this argument as logically requiring the abolishment of the Girls’ CYCC.

GM Kevin Spraggett and IM Tom O’Donnell have stated on ChessTalk a number of times over the past 2 years : “ Playing weak players is bad for your game “.

If we look at the two parallel tournaments, there is no doubt that the CYCC Girls’ tournament is the weaker. The Canadian Girls’ Top U 10 List has in the first 2 spots, two good up and coming girl players – Alina and Hazel Smith. But there is a 480 rating point difference between them and the 3rd place girl. By comparison, Alina and Hazel are #3 and # 4 on the Top U 10 (mixed) list. And the 3rd place girl is only # 16 ! So it is clear

that the strongest opposition for Alina and Hazel will come in the CYCC, not the Girls' CYCC.

Some players have argued that this strength discrepancy, in and of itself, is a good reason to eliminate the Girls' CYCC. They believe we should not be providing an inferior tournament for girls. It should not even exist as an option. When girls play in a girls-only tournament, they play weaker opponents, and their game becomes worse. As well, they may see their "successes" unrealistically – they may well have been much less "successful" against the stronger opposition of the equivalent CYCC. In the CYCC, boys and girls play on an equal footing, in a "real" competitive atmosphere.

Certainly this argument has merit. But the fact, nevertheless, may be that there are very good reasons to keep the Girls' CYCC. Perhaps it meets other needs and serves other purposes. No one is forced to play in the Girls' CYCC – it is merely an option, for those whose needs are not met by the CYCC.

What do you think about this argument? Next Issue we will continue looking at the arguments for a CYCC only.

The Debate on Abolishing the 2002 Canadian Women's Closed Championship

In the last Issue # 2 of SCTCN&V, we had a hidden-identity "guest Governor" contributor on the topic of the proposed abolition of the 2002 Canadian Women's Closed Championship. We asked you, our readers, to guess who it was.

We're now ready to reveal his identity! Our contributor was David Cohen, CFC Women's Coordinator. The opinion he expressed at that time, however, was not an "official" CFC position, but merely his own personal reflections on the topic.

2001 Canadian Closed Champion – Alexandre Lesiege

Our congratulations to both Alex Lesiege and Kevin Spraggett for such great games in their playoff match in Brantford, Ontario, on Sept. 13 – 15. It will definitely go down in Canadian chess history as one of the great moments in Canadian chess. Our special congratulations to Alexandre for his 2.5 - .5 victory (the fourth game of the match was not needed)! Good luck in the first round of the FIDE World CC in Moscow this November.

2001 Americas Women's Continental Championship

This 9 round swiss tournament was played Sept. 20 – 29, in Merida, Venezuela. The top prize was not only a \$\$ prize, but a first round place in the FIDE Women's WCC in Moscow in November. 18 women from 6 countries participated, including 1 WGM, 9 WIM's and 1 WFM.

Our Canadian Champion, WIM Nava Starr, was intending to participate, and represent Canada, even though she had already won a first round place in the Women's WCC by virtue of winning the 2001 Women's Canadian Closed & Zonal (this was only finally sorted out by CFC with FIDE during the week before the start of the Continental).

As everyone knows, the terrorist attack on the USA happened on Sept. 11. As a result of it, and the consequent disruption of airline flights, Nava did not attend.

For similar reasons, our second representative, Amanda Benggawan, decided not to play.

Unfortunately, this has meant that Canada had no participants in this inaugural tournament, just as it had no participants in the inaugural 2001 Americas Continental Championship in August. As well, noteworthy was that no other North Americans (USA, Mexico) participated either.

After 7 rounds (at the time of publishing, the official website had not yet posted the final results), leading was WIM Liliana Buriyovich of Argentina.

2001 Kitchener Masters Tournament

Over the past three weekends, this 9 round, invitational FIDE-rated tournament took place at the Kitchener City Hall. We are advised that this tournament was the inspiration of two of the players [Michael Dougherty (who won with 7/9 pts.) and Hans Jung], who nurtured this event along to strengthen chess in Southern Ontario – their leadership in this is impressive (along with all the other volunteer hands that made it work). The organizers hope to make it a twice annual series – the target date for the first in 2002 is next April/May. Congratulations on implementing a great idea !

Scarborough 2001/2 Active Series – Starts Next Month !

SCC is pleased to be able to present its monthly Active tournament series again this club year. We have obtained a NEW LOCATION (the old location of McGregor Park Recreation Centre was no longer available). The new series will be held in Committee Rooms 1 and 2 [off the main floor rotunda] of the SCARBOROUGH CIVIC CENTRE, next to the Scarborough Town Centre.

The rooms are large, and playing there will be enjoyable. It is easily accessible by public transit. As well, there is adequate parking.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the City of Toronto, which is providing the space free, as a community service, once a month, from November, 2001 to June, 2002.

Our Scarborough November Active '01 will begin the series, on Sunday, November 24. We will also have a NEW START TIME – registration will be from 9:00 – 10:00 a.m., with round 1 beginning at 10:00 a.m. The 6 round, one day tournament will end before 6:00 p.m., and there will be a short lunch break.

The second in the series will be held Sun., December 9, 2001. Our dates in 2002 will be released shortly.

So please mark these 2 dates now in your chess tournament calendar. We look forward to seeing you there, and having another successful Scarborough Active Series !

SCC Closing

SCC will close Sunday, Oct. 7, for the Dutton Chess long weekend Toronto Thanksgiving Open '01. SCC Sunday tournament play resumes Sun., Oct. 14.

NOTE :

A – Members/ non-members may contact Bob Armstrong, ed. , directly, or through SCC e-mail, to :

1. Be added to the e-mail list; 2. Submit content (fact, opinion, criticism - recommendations help!).

B – An item in any language may be submitted for publication, if accompanied by an English translation.

C – The opinions expressed here are those of the editor, and not necessarily those of the Scarborough CC.