

INDIAN TRAIL – ELM PLACE CHESS CLUB HANDBOOK

2009-2010

Welcome to the Indian Trail – Elm Place Chess Club. Chess has enjoyed explosive growth among young players in recent years, and for good reason. This classic battle of wits is fun and exciting! Chess has also been shown to improve academic performance, concentration, logical thinking, social skills, and self-esteem. (Research articles on this subject are available from the club.) With the recent surge in interest among young people, chess has also shed its reputation as a game only for intellectuals.

Eligibility. The club is open to students in Grades K-8. We welcome players at all skill levels and at all levels of commitment. Some members attend every club meeting and participate in the club's competitive events. Others are more social players and come less frequently.

Meeting times and attendance. The club meets every Monday and Wednesday afternoon in the multi-purpose room at Indian Trail from 3:20 to 5:20. Members are not required to attend all year or to attend every session and may leave early. Attendance will be taken and parents will be asked to specify in writing any variations from full-time attendance. Parents will be phoned if their child does not attend as expected. They will also be required to provide emergency contact information and specify what should be done in the event their child is not picked up at the designated time.

Pickup procedures. Club ends at 5:20, and parents are expected to come to the multi-purpose room (MPR) to get their kids. (Kids are not allowed to go upstairs to meet their parents in front of school or at the side door.) Because the front door is often locked at 4 pm, please use the side door by the playground, convenient to the main (south) parking lot.

You are free to pick your kids up earlier than 5:20. If there are any other variations – eg you want your child to walk home, if someone other than a parent will be picking up your child, or if your child is being taken home by another parent, we need to know in writing (a note or an email) and will ask kids in these categories to sign out when they leave.

In an emergency, you can call me on my cell phone, but please be aware that reception is sometimes spotty in the MPR. My cell number is 847-987-7969. If necessary, you can also call the school office, but sometimes there is no one there after 4 pm, and please be aware that it's a fairly long way from the office to the MPR.

Come Visit! Students, parents, teachers and others often drop in to visit and play, and are always welcome. Kids enjoy playing against adults. Scholastic competitions, however, are normally "kids only."

Instruction. Unlike most scholastic clubs, we are committed to offering regular instruction to members at all levels of play. Beginners are welcome, and most club members learn to play chess at the club. To further help beginners, more experienced players often sit with new members during their first few games to be sure they know the rules. Members can also take advantage of the chess books in the school library and the chess instructional software available in the school's computer lab.

Club groups. Club members are divided into three groups (Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced) based on their relative playing strength. Some players who know some of the rules may nonetheless be placed in

the Beginners group to ensure that they have a solid foundation in chess fundamentals before moving to a more advanced group.

Most members get the most pleasure by playing against members of their same group, who are likely to be of approximately the same strength. But players are free to play outside their group, and this often happens. Players are more likely to learn when they play against a stronger opponent.

Club ladder and ratings. Club members belong to the club ladder, which ranks them primarily according to how well they play. Because wins and losses count towards the club ladder, we keep track of them on game report forms available at club meetings. The ratings of all club members on the ladder are recalculated regularly and posted. The method used to award points on the club ladder is described below (see "How the Club Ladder Works"). Bonus points are also given for teaching less experienced players, helping out at the club, and working through supplemental chess lessons available on the club software. Players violating club rules may also have points deducted.

Competition and special events. The club offers frequent opportunities for competition. We expect to play matches against other scholastic clubs and will encourage members to play in local weekend tournaments. We will also have competitions in varying formats within the club and hold occasional special events such as "simultaneous exhibitions," where top chess players come to the club to play against numerous club members simultaneously. Pizza is sometimes served following these events.

Trophies and awards. Trophies are awarded at the end of the academic year to the top finishers in the club's year-end tournament and the top finishers on the club's ladder. Members who join the club late in the academic year may be ineligible for certain year-end awards. Club members will also have the opportunity to win trophies at outside tournaments. The club also awards colored "Thinking Tags" for performance across a wide range of measures in the club. We have a separate handout describing the club's incentive system.

What types of kids like chess? Many parents wonder if their children will like chess. Although it is hard to know ahead of time, good predictors are whether their children enjoy a challenge, are competitive, are good students, have good concentration skills, are good on computers, have good memories, and like other games, especially games of strategy and games involving spatial relationships. Chess players also tend to be systematic and logical, able to plan ahead, and creative and flexible thinkers.

There are many exceptions to these generalizations. Some very strong chess players do not excel at academic work or find school difficult. Others may have learning disabilities. We are particularly proud of the progress and growing self-confidence of many of these players.

Beyond having widely differing abilities, chess players also vary widely in their interests and temperaments. Some are loners; others are highly social. Some are top athletes; others are not very athletic. And so on.

Girls seem to like chess as much as boys, and scholastic clubs are often 25% to 50% female. In the past, competitive chess has been dominated by men, but some of the world's top players are now women. We are aware of gender issues and try to ensure that the club is a comfortable, exciting and engaging place for girls as well as boys.

The director of the club is Jerry Neugarten, a retired attorney. He is assisted by parents who attend club meetings, including parents who are not chess players. Additional coaches help teach the club's intermediate and advanced players as well as beginners in grades K and 1.

Sponsorship. Our expenses include paying coaches, buying equipment and trophies, and paying tournament entry fees for those who need assistance. We are sponsored by the Indian Trail PTO.

Parental assistance. Parental involvement is been essential to the club's success. Parents may help by attending club meetings, by helping with tournament registrations, by car pooling to away matches or tournaments, and in other ways.

CLUB POLICIES AND RULES

Lessons. We take teaching seriously, and expect club members to attend lessons when they are offered. Group lessons normally run approximately 45 minutes. Games played by more advanced members of the club and recorded in chess notation are often analyzed individually.

Boards, sets and other equipment. The club has a number of good quality sets (large, solid pieces and vinyl roll-up boards), so it is not necessary to bring sets to club meetings. Members may also buy similar sets, boards and carrying bags through the club. We also sell chess clocks, software, and books. Chess equipment makes great gifts! Members attending tournaments outside the club should bring their own sets and clocks. The club sometimes takes sets for those who don't have them.

Playing outside the club. Because chess skills improve with practice, members are encouraged to play outside the club as often as possible. Some families report that chess has added a new and pleasurable dimension to family life.

Chess-playing computers and software. Some members have special chess computers or chess games on their home computers. This is another excellent way to improve your game, and computers are forgiving -- you can take back your bad moves! If you play against a computer and are able to set the strength of your opponent, set it so that you win at least a third of your games. When people consistently lose, they become quickly discouraged.

The club has also installed instructional software called "Think Like a King" on the school's computers. TLAK is the official software of the United States Chess Federation, and is regarded by many as the best scholastic instructional software on the market. TLAK is, coincidentally, based in Highland Park.

Snacks. Most kids like an after-school snack. Bring your own. Except on special occasions, the club does not provide them.

Cleaning Up. After you have played your last game of the day, put your pieces into the bags provided, counting them to be sure the set is complete. Take your pieces and board to the equipment table. Throw your garbage out and wipe up any spills. Extra ladder points are awarded for extra cleanup.

Homework. Members are permitted to use a portion of the club meeting to do their homework.

Other games during club meetings. Some members like to play card games or other board games during club meetings. This is permitted only after 4:45 pm.

RULES OF BEHAVIOR

The rules of behavior at the club are more lenient than those at school, but rules are still necessary for safety and to ensure everyone's enjoyment.

Running around and rough-housing are not permitted.

Leaving the multi-purpose room is not permitted, except for lessons or with permission. Club members are not allowed to enter classrooms or hallways not used for chess club and may not play with materials in any classrooms.

Other prohibited conduct includes cheating, using profanity, causing a disruption, playing catch or other sports, taunting other members, and engaging in other conduct evidencing poor sportsmanship.

Interference in other people's games is prohibited. This includes not only making noise, talking to, or offering advice to a player, but any conduct which distracts a player.

Noise. Members may talk during club meetings, but are asked to keep their volume down. Noise is disturbing to serious chess players.

Reporting offensive conduct. If someone is bothering you, ask them politely to stop. If they don't, ask an adult for help before the situation escalates.

Violations. Violation of club rules may lead to a warning, a report to parents, a "time out," or a point deduction on the club ladder. Serious or repeated infractions will result in suspension or expulsion from the club.

WHAT WE EXPECT FROM OUR PLAYERS

Chess notation. All good chess players learn to record the moves of their games in chess notation. This preserves games so that they can be analyzed afterwards to help identify weaknesses in technique. Notation is also required in some tournaments; in other tournaments, a player not taking notation may be penalized by losing time. Club members are therefore expected to learn notation as quickly as they can and practice it until it becomes second-nature. Proficiency at notation is also required before members can join the club's advanced group. Members receive bonus points for using notation correctly.

Communication skills. A good chess player learns to analyze board positions and put into words the strengths and weaknesses of each side's position. In addition, strong players always have a plan, at least for the short term, and are able to describe it. Although it may be difficult, we expect members to articulate these features of their games.

Post-game analysis. Coaches and advanced players will often review completed games with club members. This can be enormously helpful to a developing player. Game reviews should be a mixture of praise and constructive criticism. Members who have taken notation are also encouraged to seek out adults or more experienced players to review their games.

"46 Chess Tips" and other instructional material. The club has compiled a list of basic strategy tips ("46 Chess Tips") which is available to all members. Other written instructional material is also available.

USCF Ratings. Members are encouraged to obtain official ratings from the United States Chess Federation (USCF). They do so by joining the USCF and then competing in USCF-rated events. USCF ratings reflect a player's standing relative to other USCF members around the country. Ratings are available online, along with each member's record in competitions.

RULES RELATED TO THE PLAY OF THE GAME

Etiquette and politeness. Proper chess etiquette is expected. Players are expected to introduce themselves if necessary and to shake hands both before and after games. It is customary to wish your opponent good luck before the game, and to thank your opponent for a good game after the game, whatever the game's outcome. Members are also expected to be polite.

Do games "count" on the club ladder? Unless BOTH players agree in advance, games WILL count towards the club ladder.

Challenges. A player looking for a game may challenge anyone to play who is not then playing. The challenging player has the right to insist that the game be counted toward the ladder, but does not have to do so. Only one such challenge (per player challenged) will be permitted per club meeting. The directors may excuse members from challenges in special circumstances.

"Touch-move." All games are "touch-move." Once a piece is touched by a player, that piece must be moved. Inadvertent (unintentional) touches and touches to adjust the pieces on the squares do not count. Once a piece is placed on a square and the player's hand is removed, the move cannot be changed. If a player touches an opponent's piece after moving a piece of his own, and the opponent's piece may legally be captured, it must be captured.

Problems arising during a game. If a problem arises during a game, don't move your pieces. Stop your clock (if you are using one) and get a club director immediately. Once pieces have been moved, it is much harder to evaluate a claim and resolve a problem related to a particular board. The director will rely on the players' notation sheets whenever they are available.

Game report forms. Most games are played for points on the club ladder. For such games, it is each player's responsibility to ensure that the results of their games are recorded correctly on the club's game report forms. If one player records the game information, the other is expected to check it. Wins and losses cannot be correctly tallied for the club ladder unless the reporting is accurate.

Bughouse, in which players are paired and collaborate in playing two games of high-speed chess on adjacent boards at the same time, is permitted. The rules of the game are described below ("How to Play

Bughouse"). Bughouse is fun, but because it is played so quickly, it normally doesn't improve one's game. As a result, only one Bughouse game per club meeting will be counted toward the ladder.

Other Doubles and "Half-Doubles" Games. In addition to Bughouse, two players may play two other players on a single board, or one player may play against two. These games are scored differently from traditional one-on-one games (see "How Games are Scored" below). No triple (or larger) games are permitted.

Interrupted games. If your game is interrupted, such as for a lesson, and you want to continue it later, mark it with a "Do Not Disturb" note, available from the club.

Abandoned games. It is considered a resignation (and a loss) to walk away from a game in progress unless a player does so only briefly (such as to stretch, use the bathroom or get a director). Both players may agree, however, to take a break.

Swiss-System Scoring and Pairing. These rules are considered the most fair method of determining tournament winners when a large number of players are competing and players cannot play against everyone else. The system is used in virtually all scholastic tournaments, including those we will have at the club, and is explained below (see "Swiss-Style Tournaments").

HOW THE CLUB LADDER WORKS

Ratings points are gained or lost on the club ladder by a player's winning or losing games. The ratings are calculated by computer software called Chess Club Manager. The number of points gained or lost depends upon the relative strength of the players. The basic notion, modeled after the rating system used by the USCF, is that defeating a higher-rated player is worth more points than defeating a lower-rated player. Similarly, one loses fewer points by losing to a higher-rated player than losing to a lower-rated player.

For most players joining the USCF, club ratings will be higher than USCF ratings. This is partly because the club starts players at 900 (see "How Ratings are First Established" below), which is higher than the average rating of USCF scholastic players.

How Ratings are First Established. New members will begin the year with a rating of 900. Returning members with ratings over 1000 will retain their old ratings. New members with strong chess backgrounds are occasionally assigned initial ratings higher than 900 to help ensure equitable scoring.

How Normal Games are Scored. A player who beats another equally rated player gains 16 points. A player who beats a higher-rated player (based on the two player's club ratings) gains more points, to a maximum of 28, while a player beating a lower rated player may gain as little as 4 points. Where games are drawn, the lower rated player will gain points, but fewer points than if that player had won. A sheet is available at the club explaining the scoring system in more detail.

How Bughouse, Doubles, and Half-Doubles Games Are Scored. These games are scored with a simple system: winners win 10 points, and losers lose 10 points. No distinctions are made based upon the strength of either team.

Non-Ladder Games. Players are free to agree "not to count" any games they play, but the agreement must be made before the game starts.

Bonus and Penalty Points. Members can receive extra points in a variety of ways, including working through the lessons in the club's instructional software, teaching less experienced players, and helping at the club with cleanup or equipment. Points are also awarded for taking chess notation and for success at club tournaments. Penalty points may be assessed for violations of club rules.

SWISS-STYLE TOURNAMENTS

Essential to the "Swiss-Style" tournament is that players who continue to win are paired with each other in subsequent rounds, reducing the number of players who are undefeated after each round and generally ensuring more difficult opponents as the tournament progresses. Similarly, players who lose their games face others who also lose, and their opponents normally get easier as the tournament progresses.

These are not elimination tournaments. Even players who lose all or most of their games will continue to play, facing players who have similar records. Thus, especially towards the end of the tournament, most of the games should be reasonably close.

A player's score in the tournament shows how he or she is doing. Each time a player wins, that player gets 1 point for that round, while a draw is worth ½ a point and a loss is 0 points. Players with the same scores face each other as often as possible.

In the first round, all the players are ranked in rating order. (If it is an outside tournament, players' USCF ratings will be used; if the tournament is for club members only, club ratings will be used.) The top half of the group is then paired against the bottom half. For example, if 50 players compete, Player #1 plays against Player #26, #2 plays against #27, and so on. The same method is used for later rounds. Players with the same score are grouped together and then placed in rating order. The top half is again paired against the bottom half. Sometimes, if there is an odd number of players with the same score, the lowest ranked player will drop to the next lowest score group and play the highest-rated player in that group. If there are an odd number of players in the entire tournament, then the lowest ranked player with the lowest score (a different player each round) will receive a 1-point "bye," meaning that player receives the point without having to play that round. Because pairings are made by score first, then by rating, it is not uncommon for players to face opponents with much higher ratings.

Ties may be broken in a number of ways. One or more "blitz" playoff games (such as Game/7) are frequently employed to determine first place. Otherwise, ties are broken by determining which of the tied players has faced more difficult opponents. This can be calculated in several ways; the Director normally announces the method to be employed before the tournament begins.

HOW TO PLAY BUGHOUSE

Bughouse is a fast, exciting form of doubles chess, in which two players play simultaneous games against two others. Let's assume players A and B are playing against C and D. If A plays white against C, B must play black against D. The games begin with normal chess rules. Once pieces begin to be captured, however, the game changes. If A captures one of C's black pieces, he gives that piece to B. B (who is playing black) is allowed to place the piece anywhere on his board, including on a square causing instant

check mate! (Pieces captured by B, C and D are similarly given to their partners.) The only exception is that a pawn may not be placed on a player's first rank (where it could not have begun), or on that player's last rank (where it could immediately promote to a Queen or another piece).

The winning team is the team which wins first on either board.

There are a few other special rules in Bughouse:

- The "touch-move" rule is not in effect as long as a player has not hit his clock.
- The "Quiet Rule" does not apply. This may help in many ways. For example, your partner can give you advice. You can also tell your partner you need a particular piece ("I need a Knight!").
- It is permissible, as long as your clock is still running, to delay making a move. This is the smart thing to do if you are about to be check-mated. Perhaps you can help your partner win while your game is on hold, or your partner might capture and give you a piece that will save your game. Stalling for time won't help you, however, if your partner's opponent has more time left on his clock than you have. He can simply wait you out, and you will lose on time.
- When a pawn promotes, there are normally no extra Queens (or other pieces) available to take the place of the promoted pawn. The pawn should simply be laid on its side on the square to which it has promoted, and then played as whatever piece it has been promoted to. If it is captured, however, it reverts back to a pawn. (In the helter-skelter world of Bughouse, it is too hard to remember what the pawn was in its prior life.)
- If a player moves into check by mistake (or leaves himself in check and moves another piece by mistake), his opponent is permitted to capture his King and declare victory!

Bughouse is difficult and requires a special strategy of its own. It is normally played very quickly, such as Game/5 (each player having five minutes to finish his game), and can become very hectic. Many players love it. It is not, however, serious chess. This is why only one Bughouse game per club meeting can be counted toward the club ladder.