

Mar, Yap, Shipman and the Bongo Drums at the 34th People's Tournament

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FM Craig Mar (by Shorman)

The longest running tournament in Northern California returned for the 34th time on President's Day weekend in Berkeley. The name People's Tournament is fully appropriate for an event held in a ballroom overlooking historic Sproul Plaza on the campus of the University of California at Berkeley. However, only a small percentage of the 124 players in the adult tournament were old enough to remember the Free Speech Movement and other manifestations of the popular counterculture of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The People's Tournament itself dates back to this era. The turnout for this year's event was about 20% less than previous editions, resulting in a slight reduction of the prize fund. The lower attendance may be directly related to last year's organizational fiasco that led to the tournament being held at the East Bay Chess Club instead of its traditional venue. Fortunately, the student activities board (SUPERB) at Cal decided to host this tournament once again in 2007. Without their support, it would be impossible for CalChess to reserve such a spectacular venue at practically no cost.

Our college student hosts did nearly manage to ruin everybody's weekend though. The mysterious terminology "40/2, G/1" was not terribly clear for a non-chess player. Consequently, the representatives of SUPERB did not realize that the building had to be open later than the usual 7pm closing time. Although most players were unaware of it, this crisis was not resolved until about 20 minutes before round 2! The tournament could continue as scheduled on Saturday and Sunday (rounds 1-4) but had to be shortened on Monday (rounds 5-6). Hence, the final two games were played at the faster time control of G/2.

That sets the scene for the chess tournament itself. The players competed in five sections: Open, Expert, Class A, Class B and Reserve (under 1600). One peculiar feature of the big tournaments in Northern California is that a large number of people "play up" a section. In other words, the Expert section consisted of three true experts and nine A players. Some people chose to play up multiple sections, including seven players rated under 2000 in the top section. Perhaps future organizers are advised to limit playing up with higher fees and restricting playing up more than one section.

A total of 18 players competed in the **Open section**, headlined by five masters including top-rated FM Craig Mar (2425) and 77-year old IM Walter Shipman (2217). Surprisingly, the section's youngest player took control early and was the clear leader after four rounds. Daniel Naroditsky (2115), ranked #1 in the country for age 11, won his first three games and then drew against FM Mar in round 4. The youngster was not to be intimidated by the 2425 rating and even sacrificed a piece against the Najdorf for a strong attack. Reality hit home in rounds 5 and 6 as Daniel lost both games to strong masters. He will have to chalk it up as a learning experience.

That opened the door for other players. The top four rated players all managed to escape defeat, but the draw ratio was surprisingly high considering the aggressive tendencies of the players involved. FM Mar, NM Nicolas Yap (2295) and IM Shipman ended up sharing first place at 4.5/6. One bizarre quirk was that none of the three winners faced each other in the tournament! FM Mar and NM Yap each drew with NM Michael Aigner (2308) as well as with two teenage experts. The only person to win all of his games was IM Shipman, but due to his advanced age, he played just three games and took half-point byes in each of the evening rounds.

The Open section is also the testing grounds for some of the area's elite juniors. No fewer than eight kids played in the toughest division. Adarsh Konda tied for fourth place just half a point out of first place. Kudos also go to Matt Zavortink for gaining 21 points to bring his rating up to 2046, a net gain of 61 points since the beginning of the year (which is especially hard over 2000).

Only 12 people participated in the **Expert section**, in part because most of the real experts actually played in the top section. Nikunj Oza (1856) and Rohan Sathe (1899) set themselves apart from the competition with undefeated scores of 5.0/6. The co-champions, who drew their individual encounter in the fifth round, each gained approximately 70 rating points for the weekend. Martin Marshall (1898) took the third place prize.

In the opinion of this writer, the most interesting competition occurred in the **A section**. Surely nobody else would have predicted that Steven Zierk, with an official rating of 1527, would take clear first place in the A section! However, pigs can fly and Steven finished with four wins and two draws for 5.0/6. No, Steven was not a sandbagger but rather returned to chess after a layoff of over five years. The 1527 rating reflected his strength in 2nd grade when he was ranked #2 in the country. Today he is in 8th grade and is able to complement his enormous talent with the patience and calculation required to succeed in chess. Steven's post-tournament rating of 1860 is probably still underrated, as demonstrated by his 3.0/4 score against 2200 average opposition at the Silicon Valley Challenge in January.

Four people tied for second place with 4.5/6 in the 25 player A section. Alan Naroditsky (1916) and Martin Whalley (1833) led the section after rounds 4 and 5, respectively, but Alan lost to Martin in round 5 while Martin lost to Yefim Bukh (1932) in round 6. Those three players were also joined by Kevin Hwa (1648), who gained 105 rating points by defeating two 1900 rated opponents on the last day. This author is proud to mention that all three of the teenagers who won money in the A section are his students. Congrats to Steven, Alan and Kevin!

Unlike the A section, which was dominated by talented juniors, the **B section** featured the revenge of the adults. Surprisingly, only one of the four prize winners was a kid. Roman Vaisberg (1640) went 5.0/6 en route to clear first place. He did lose one game though, in the fifth round to Darren Lustig (1730). A last round draw on top board left Darren tied for second place with his opponent Michael Kai Lum (1766) and junior Mukund Chillakanti (1597). Mukund and his brother Kartik (1603) and gained an impressive total of 144 rating points in the tournament.

One particular feature of the location overlooking Sproul Plaza is the incessant banging of the bongo drums outside. Of course, this is annoying to many chess players, yet some old-timers have grown accustomed to the steady rhythm of the drums. In 2005, the drummers were mysteriously absent. However, on Saturday morning during the first round, the BOOM, BOOM, BOOM sounds began. Then the noise mysteriously ended. It turns out that one parent had bribed the drummers to go buy a lunch just so that the chess players could have some quiet time. Surprisingly, the bongo drums did not return for the rest of the weekend.

The lowest rated section in the adult tournament was the **Reserve (under 1600)**. A total of 44 players entered and many were in fact youngsters. Congratulations to juniors Rahul Desirazu (1549) and Kevin Liu (1423) on sharing first place at 4.5/5. Rahul, who drew one game, broke 1600 with his performance while Kevin, who took a bye in round 3, gained a whopping total of 176 rating points! The bonus points in the USCF rating formulas really add up for the local juniors. Not to be completely outdone by the kids, three adults shared third place at 4.0/5: Harold Parker (1556), Vijay Jasthi (1517) and Jeff Kottcamp (1547). Harold drew with Rahul on top board in the final round while Vijay and Jeff each lost to one of the co-champs. Finally, the top under 1400 honors went to Mark Vargas with a score of 3.5/5.

The **Young People's Tournament** on Monday attracted another 59 participants. 3rd grader Daniel Ho (1228) was the only perfect 5-0 score in the K-6 section. 6th grader Sudarshan Seshadri (1257) was also finished undefeated, but a third round draw meant a second place trophy. 9th grader Jeremy Lowenthal (1424) finished with 4.5/5 to take top honors in the 7-12 grade section. One of the youngest players in the scholastic tournament was actually blind and had to play with a special chess set. Chess is truly a sport that everyone can play, even those with physical disabilities.

I will close this article with a big *Thank You* to the organizers and directors of the successful tournament. CalChess President Richard Koepcke did the lion's share of the directing work. Tom Langland was in charge of running the scholastic tournament. Perhaps most important was SUPERB representative George Law, who was in charge of the obtaining the site and managed the bookkeeping for the event. Hopefully we can do this again next year with an even larger turnout!

Here are links to the **final standings**, in tiebreak order. The tournament has been USCF rated, with links provided on each page.

34th People's Tournament: <http://www.calchess.org/controlpanel/files/Peoples07.htm>

Young People's Tournament: <http://www.calchess.org/controlpanel/files/YoungPeoples2007.html>

Over **300 photos** have been posted on the CalChess, ChessDryad and CalNorth websites. Check them out at the following links.

By Mark Shelton: http://www.chessdryad.com/photos/berkeley/people_07m/index.htm

By Richard Shorman: http://www.chessdryad.com/photos/berkeley/people_07r/index.htm

By Alan Kirshner: <http://www.calnorthjuniorchess.org/YP07/index.html>

By Michael Aigner: <http://www.calchess.org/modules.php?name=coppermine&file=thumbnails&album=25>

Please see the Java Viewer below for **five lightly annotated games** from the tournament.



NM Nicolas Yap (by Shorman)



IM Walter Shipman (by Aigner)



FM Craig Mar (by Shelton)



Daniel Naroditsky (by Aigner)