

A Tuesday Tradition at the Mechanic Institute

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by IM John Donaldson

Not long after Bobby Fischer won the World Championship the Mechanics' Institute Chess Club of San Francisco held a tournament on twelve consecutive Tuesdays nights. M.I. Chess Director Ray Conway had experimented with other weekly formats but soon realized he was on to a good thing when 80 players turned out for one of his 12-round "Marathons" in 1974. A diverse group of players of all strengths from Master to beginner appreciated an alternative to the weekend Swiss and a tradition was born with tournaments running continually throughout the year with a short break between events.



The Fall Marathon of 2012 will mark the 40-year anniversary of the Tuesday Night Marathon series. The format has altered a bit. These days most tournaments are typically only 8 rounds and three half points byes are offered in a concession to these busy times but much remains the same. Every year there are five events and they are played with a four hour time control (30/90; G/30) starting at 6:30 pm and ending around the Club's closing at 10:30 pm which enables tournament participants to make it to work the next morning with a good nights sleep. To make Tuesdays a destination night at the MI most regulars check out and return books to the library and take in the free weekly one-hour lecture held before the round. Normally the lectures are given by the Mechanics' Chess Director but about a dozen times a year there are guest speakers, usually visiting Grandmasters with the last being Loek Van Wely in January. This continues a Mechanics' tradition of bringing world-class players to the Institute that began with Zuckertort in 1884. All world champions of the 20th century have visited the Mechanics' except Botvinnik and Kasparov. We hope to rectify the latter omission some day.

Some things have changed. Since 2006 the TNMs have been FIDE rated enabling many regulars to earn their first international ratings. The past few years thanks to Peter Sherwood all the games have been entered into Chess Base. They can be found at the club's website (www.chessclub.org) and are available in both PGN format and in an online game viewer. The pairings for each TNM go up at Monday noon and many participants avail themselves of the opportunity to prepare for their Tuesday evening battle.

Among the distinguished players to participate in the Tuesday Night Marathon series are International Masters Walter Shipman, Jeremy Silman and Ricardo DeGuzman. Junior players usually only play in the summer events when school has finished but among those have who have gained valuable experience as they moved up the ranks are GM-elect Sam Shankland and IM-elect Daniel Naroditsky. Cameron Wheeler and Vignesh Panchanatham both used the TNM to get strong practice before playing in the World Under 10 Championship last fall where they each finished in the top ten.



While many Masters have played in the TNMs over the years the event is really for club players who appreciate not only the chance for friendly competition but also the camaraderie. One of these players, Expert Peter Grey, has a near perfect attendance record dating back to the very first TNM, and has playing over 1,500 games in the series which has averaged 50 to 80 players per event. The all-time record is 86 participants, which took every one of the Mechanics' old oak tables, purchased by the club in 1915 after earlier ones were destroyed in the 1906 earthquake. The Mechanics' present building was completed in 1909 and is at the same site the Institute has occupied since 1885.

Another regular, who both played and directed Tuesday Night Marathons for three decades until his death last October, was Michael Goodall. Mike, who was everyone's friend, enjoyed the TNMs more for the chance to see old comrades than tournament ambitions. That didn't stop him from pulling off the occasional first round upset (the event is played in one section) that players on the bottom half of the crosstable live for.

Here he defeats Master and future Women's Grandmaster Batchimeg Tuvshintugs who played in the TNMs for several years before returning to her native Mongolia.

Goodall, Michael (1817) - Tuvshintugs, Batchimeg (2310) [B70]

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.g3 d6 4.Bg2 Nf6 5.Nge2 g6 6.d4 cxd4 7.Nxd4 Nxd4 8.Qxd4 Bg7 9.0-0 0-0 10.Bg5

More normal are 10.Qb4 and 10.Qd3 getting the queen out of harm's way, but the text has been played by strong players. White is aiming for an classical anti-Dragon strategy based on a timely Nd5.

10...Bd7

10...h6 11.Bd2 Be6 is more to the point trying to exploit the queen's position on d4. If White plays 12.Qb4 Black has 12...a5 13.Qxb7 Rb8 recovering the pawn with a good game.

11.Rad1 Qa5

11...Ng4 12.Qb4 (12.Qd2 h6 13.Bf4 g5 14.Be3 Nxe3 15.Qxe3 Rc8) 12...a5 was again the indicated course of action. Black needs to bother White's queen to generate counterplay.

12.Qd2



Black must deal with the threat of Nd5.

12...Qe5?!

12...Rac8 is met by 13.e5! Qxe5 14.Rfe1 with a clear advantage.; Best was 12...Rfe8 anticipating 13.Nd5 which can be met by (13.Bxf6 Bxf6 14.Nd5 Qxa2 15.Nc7 Bxb2) 13...Qxd2 14.Nxf6+ Bxf6 15.Bxd2 Bxb2 16.Rb1 Bf6 17.Rxb7 Be6 with equal chances.

13.Rfe1 Bc6 14.Nd5 Rae8?!

14...Bxd5 15.exd5 Qxb2 16.Rxe7 Rfe8 17.Rde1 Rxe7 18.Rxe7 leaves White for choice but was objectively stronger.

15.c3

15.c4 setting up a Maroczy structure was also possible but Mike plays in classical style restricting the Black bishop on g7 which is likely a stronger course of action.

15...Bxd5 16.exd5 Qf5



17.Re2

Simple and strong. White's plan is revealed, he will pressure e7, leaving Black with the choice of remaining passive or play ...e6 which creating weaknesses in his position.

17...Qd7 18.Rde1 Kh8

Playing ...a5 and ...b5 would have been more constructive but Batchimeg is understandably frustrated with her position.

19.Qf4 Qb5?

This attempt to mix things up fails. Black had to sit tight.

20.Rxe7 Rxe7 21.Rxe7 Nxd5



22.c4!

Nicely played by Michael who simplifies into a winning ending.

22...Nxf4 23.cxb5 Nxg2 24.Kxg2 Bxb2 25.Rxb7 Bd4 26.Bh6 Rc8 27.Rxf7 Bb6 28.Rd7

28.a4 is more to the point but Michael quickly corrects himself.

28...Rc2 29.Rf7 Rc8 30.a4 Kg8 31.Rg7+ Kh8 32.Rd7 Rc4 33.a5 Bc7 34.Rf7

A nice game by Michael who played like a Master.



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Tuesday Night Marathon players come from not only all over the Bay Area but also all over the planet reflecting the diversity of the region around San Francisco. It's not uncommon to have speakers of over a dozen languages playing with Russian and Tagalog the most common tongues after English.



Ten-year-old Siddharth Banik (left), who has gain over 130 points since Thanksgiving and is now rated 1904, faces 50-year-old Todd Rumph who is zeroing in on 2200 having picked up 100 points since Labor Day weekend.

Players of all ages compete. The current Marathon ranges from ten-year-old Siddharth Banik to Dan Litowsky who turns 94 this April. Unlike many weekend tournaments the TNM is a refuge for veteran players who find the one game a week format suits them well. Typically a quarter of the participants in the Marathons are over 60 with many in their 70s.

The entry fee for the TNM has stayed constant the past decade at a reasonable \$40. What has gone up are the travel costs to get to the Mechanics. Most players who live outside San Francisco commute by train on the BART as parking and bridge tolls add up and the commute during rush hour is far from pleasant. Unfortunately unlike New York where the subway is a fixed amount irrespective of distance on BART the price is based on the length of the journey and most TNM participants pay more in travel costs than they do in entry fees. The rising travel costs have had some impact on entries the past few years.

The Mechanics' Institute is not just the oldest continuously operated chess club in the United States. Founded in downtown San Francisco just after the Gold Rush to provide technical education and training for craftsmen and to promote local and California industry, the M.I. also houses a first-rate general purpose library of over 250,000 volumes and an active events department that runs film series and hosts guest speakers on a variety of subjects. The chess collection includes complete runs of the *British Chess Magazine*, *Chess Review*, the *American Chess Bulletin*, the *Wiener Schachzeitung* and the *California Chess Reporter*. The library regularly buys all new books by leading publishers like Gambit, Quality Chess and Everyman. This plus the club being open seven days a week makes the \$95 (\$35 for juniors and students) a year membership to the Institute a good value.

Visitors are always welcome. If you are in San Francisco pay us a visit at 57 Post Street near the intersection of Montgomery and Market (nearest BART station Montgomery).

International Master John Donaldson has served as the Mechanics' Chess Director since 1998. Also read about the [Best of CLO #5 article by IM John Donaldson, 2010 Chess Olympiad: Final Impressions](#).