



The Official
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Alabama Chess
Federation

Alabama Chess Antics

Summer 2020

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Chess is **Unstoppable!**

2020 Alabama State
Championship

ONLINE

September 5-6

Greetings from the Editor

The ACF is thrilled to announce that the **2020 Alabama State Championship** will indeed be played (online) over Labor Day weekend, September 5-6, 2020.

Full details will be available on alabamachess.org, but here are few key points:

1. The Premier Section (1800+) will consist of six rounds played over two days, September 5-6, with time control G/60 d5.
2. There will be a Reserve Section (1200-1800) and an Amateur Section (<1200); these two sections will consist of 4-5 rounds and will be finished in one day, on September 5.
3. Games will be played on chess.com.
4. Players will be required to use a webcam and share their screen via Zoom. (No premium Zoom accounts are needed for participants, however. The ACF president's Zoom account will be used to host everyone.)
5. There will be no entry fee and no prizes—just chess and bragging rights!
6. USCF and ACF memberships will be required.

The pandemic won't stop chess! We look forward to carrying on the greatest of annual Alabama chess traditions—the state championship—for yet another year.

We have a number of interesting games in this edition of the *Antics*. Many thanks to **Jonathan Rasberry**, **Charles Anthony**, and **Doug Strout** for their contributions. Regarding the Game of the Quarter competition: this time, none of the submitted games occurred within the last six

months (except for Doug's game—but Doug is on the selection committee!). Thus, we will temporarily suspend the GoQ competition, but we plan to resume it for the next issue of the *Antics*.

Finally, some wonderful news of my own to report: my article “Nearly Killed on Cloud Nine: My 2019 Alabama State Championship” has won the Chess Journalists of America's 2020 Cramer Award for Best State Championship Report. I am deeply grateful to the ACF president, Jonathan Rasberry, for nominating me for this award. Let us hope that more *Antics* articles by Alabama chess writers will win other Cramer Awards in the future.

The deadline for submissions for the Fall 2020 issue of the *Antics* is November 15. Submit photos, games, and articles via Alabama.Chess.Editor@gmail.com.

-Scott Varagona

ACF Membership

Any individual may become a **Regular Member** upon the payment of annual dues of **\$15.00**. Regular members may enter ACF tournaments and receive special publications or notices from ACF as they are issued. Any chess club seeking to become an **Affiliate** is required to file the Affiliate Information Form with the Secretary of the ACF and pay annual dues of **\$35.00**. Benefits of becoming an affiliate include the right to bid to host ACF-sanctioned events, such as the Alabama State Championship, and to receive advertising through the ACF for your tournaments.

Our Alabama Representatives to the National Tournaments

by Jonathan Rasberry

Constance Wang - 8th Annual WIM Ruth Haring National Tournament of Girls State Champions representative

Yury Barnakov - 3rd Annual National Tournament of Senior State Champions

Xavier Bruni - 1st Annual John D. Rockefeller III National Tournament of Elementary School State Champions

Parker Liu - 10th Annual Dewain Barber National Tournament of Middle School State Champions

Om Badhe - 36th Annual GM Arnold Denker National Tournament of High School State Champions

How They Got Here

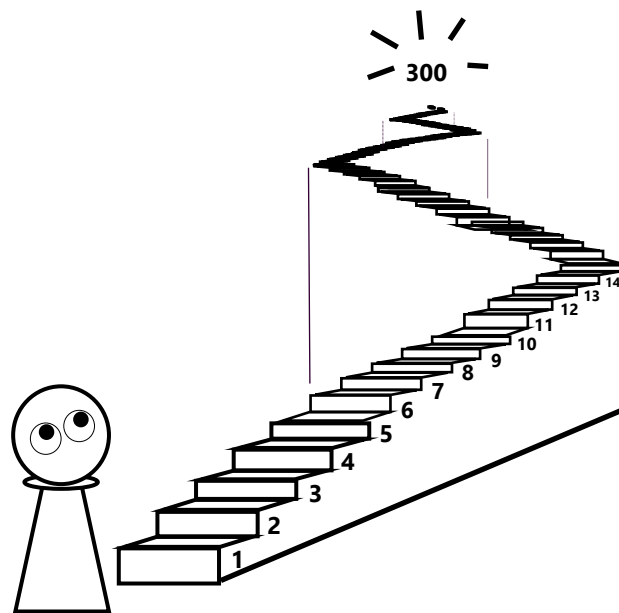
Constance defeated a field of 14 of the strongest girls in the state in the 2020 All-Girls State Championship to become our representative. **Yury** was selected by the ACF board to represent the state as he is not only our strongest senior player, but also one of our highest rated active players in the state. **Xavier** was selected by the ACF board to be our representative as the strongest elementary player by several hundred rating points. **Parker** won an online playoff between himself and several of the other strongest middle school players in the state. **Om** won an online playoff between himself and several of the strongest high school players in the state. ■

“Mastering Life”

by Scott Varagona

Some fifteen or twenty years ago, when I was doing recon work on my Alabama chess rivals online, I noticed something interesting about Bill Melvin. No matter what—even if he had a terrible tournament—his rating *never* dropped below 2200. “How did he get such a high rating floor?” I wondered. “Maybe he had a rating of 2400 long ago?” But that didn’t appear to be the case. I was mystified...

Eventually, I learned what had really happened: Bill had attained the *Original Life Master Title*. This title—which a player earns by maintaining a 2200+ USCF rating for 300 cumulative rated classical games—brings with it a permanent rating floor of 2200. What a luxury! As a National Master, although the NM *title* is permanent, one’s *rating* can still sink back below 2200. However, as an Original Life Master, one’s rating can never sink below 2200 ever again. No wonder Bill always seemed so uninhibited on the chessboard: without having to worry about his rating, he could dive head-first into every game with



all guns blazing. He was free to take risks, get creative, and always play for a win.

How I wished I could be like that! Alas, I had not even become an NM yet, and rating points were tough to come by in Alabama. I had made Expert in the year 2003, and I cracked the 2100s soon enough, but then I hit a plateau that seemed impossible to overcome. I was bobbing up and down in the 2100s for years until—*finally!*—a hot streak in the year 2012 just barely pushed me over the 2200 USCF mark, and I became a National Master. I knew

right away what my next long-term goal would be.

If becoming an NM in Alabama was difficult, then becoming an Original Life Master seemed grotesquely daunting. It had taken me fourteen years of work and over 300 tournament games just to *reach* a rating of 2200. How was I supposed to *maintain* a 2200 rating for 300 games more?! There were times when the whole thing felt like an impossible fantasy...

It was a long journey. Shortly after crossing the 2200 mark in the year 2012, I entered a slump and fell back below 2200 again. Bad start... Thankfully, later in 2013 (and through most of 2014 & 2015) I did much better and built up a nice rating cushion in the mid-2200s. I started playing in more tournaments per year than I ever had before, trying to stay sharp and "strike while the iron was hot." The trouble was, even if I had three good tournaments in a row, just one epic failure could erase months of hard-earned rating points overnight. Sometimes, if I made even a single draw in a tournament, I would lose rating points. (The most cringe-worthy moment came when I won

the 2016 Queen of Hearts with a score of 4.5/5—and I gained *one* rating point.)

Still, my play remained steady enough to keep my rating out of the danger zone. In fact, I reached my peak rating (thus far) of 2293 in the year 2017, and the year 2018 went pretty darn well also. When 2019 came, I was close enough to the 300-game total that I could calculate everything out: "If I play in these nine tournaments and I do well, then I will make Original Life Master," I told myself. That realization unnerved me. Indeed, looking back at my play in 2019, I can see that my nerves played a huge role in many games. With the title that I had dreamed about for so long *almost* in my grasp, I felt a lot of pressure. To make matters worse, my rivals were playing well. (How dare they!) Many young talents and wily veterans of Alabama chess have been clawing and kicking at me a lot in the last few years. At times, it felt like I was limping my way to the finish line.

Yet finally, at Caesar Lawrence's Montgomery Challenge tournament in October 2019, I completed my 300th game at the

2200+ level and achieved the Original Life Master Title.* At last! Now, I never have to worry about my rating ever again. Like Bill Melvin, I can get creative on the chessboard without fear of repercussions. I am free to experiment with new strategies and openings—even wild ones.

...Well, maybe not *too* wild.

At any rate, I thought I would share one of my best games from this period (2012-2019) where I was slowly marching toward the coveted title. This was the final round of the 2015 Queen of Hearts. My opponent was a three-time Alabama state champion (and truly the greatest of Americans), Brent Inman.

Scott Varagona - Brent Inman

(2264) (2129)

Queen of Hearts, Round 5

February 8, 2015

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.Qc2 0-0
5.e4

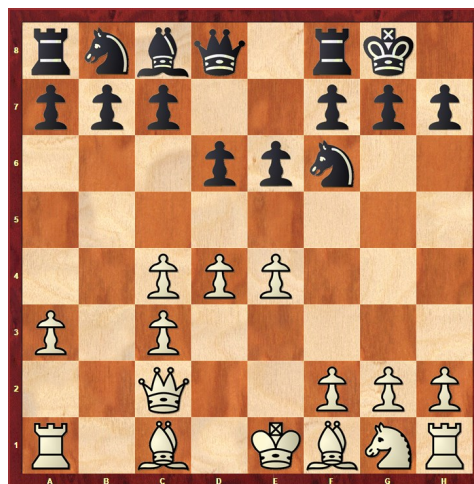
The more solid move is 5.a3, but this confrontational line with

5.e4 has earned me many clutch wins through the years. Both White and Black have to be very precise in some of the resulting positions. In my experience, Nimzo players are often unprepared for the dangers and quickly go under. To borrow a phrase from Bill Melvin, this line is a “killing field.”

5...d6

Brent chooses the most solid reply. The main book line (and the sharpest move) seems to be 5...d5, but Black must be very, *very* well-prepared in order to navigate the complications safely.

6.a3 Bxc3+ 7.bxc3



* And just in time, before the pandemic arrived in 2020...

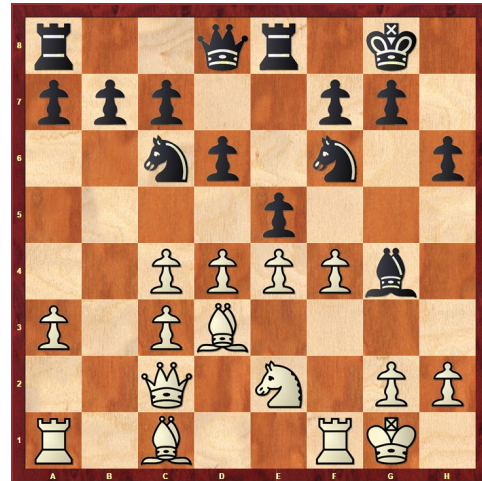
So now we have a Samisch-style structure. White intends Bd3, Ne2, f2-f4, and eventually getting a kingside attack. Black would like to stave off the attack and, if possible, attack and win White's c4-pawn. In general, if you play the White side of such structures, you cannot allow yourself to get too bent out of shape about the c4-pawn. You just have to trust that your bishops, space, and attacking chances will more than compensate.

7...h6!?

This move was a little unexpected for me. Was Bg5 so terrible a threat that it needed to be prevented like this?

8.Bd3 e5 9.Ne2 Nc6 10.0-0 Re8 11.f4 Bg4

Black makes his first big decision. Instead of trying to play against the c4-pawn with ...b6 and ...Ba6, he takes aim at the e2-knight in hopes of undermining White's d4-pawn. You can always count on Brent to find an interesting approach.



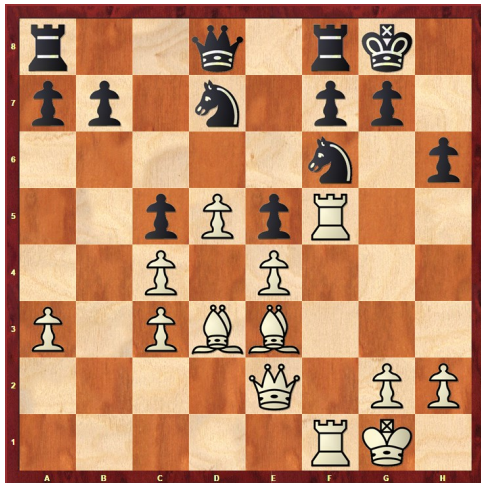
12.fxe5

Not bad: White opens the f-file and c1-h6 diagonal in preparation for a direct attack. However, another possible move was 12.Ng3!?, with the idea that 12...exd4 13.Bb2 dxc3 14.Qxc3 gives White strong pressure on the long diagonal and good compensation for the pawn.

12...dxe5 13.d5 Bxe2 14.Qxe2 Nb8

An unfortunate retreat, but 14...Ne7 15.Bxh6! looks dreadful.

15.Be3 Nbd7 16.Rf5 c5 17.Raf1 Rf8



Although White's pieces look menacing, Black has chances for defense: with the rook on f8, he can move the f6-knight away and play ...f6 or even ...g5!? to create a dark-square fortress that will be tough for White to break down. I must be quick!

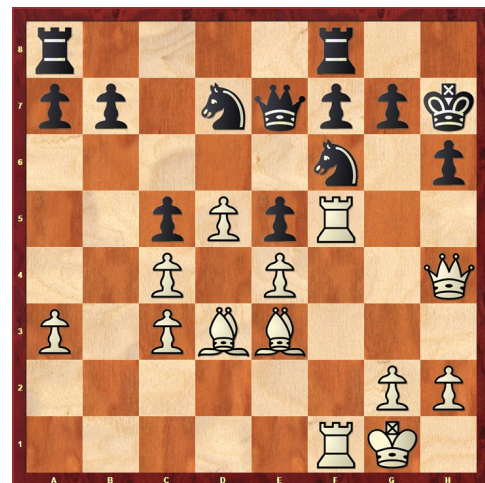
18.Qf3

My battery on the f-file prevents Black from moving the knight just yet. Black adds another defender to the f7-pawn:

18...Qe7 19.Qg3

New threat: Bxh6.

19...Kh7 20.Qh4!

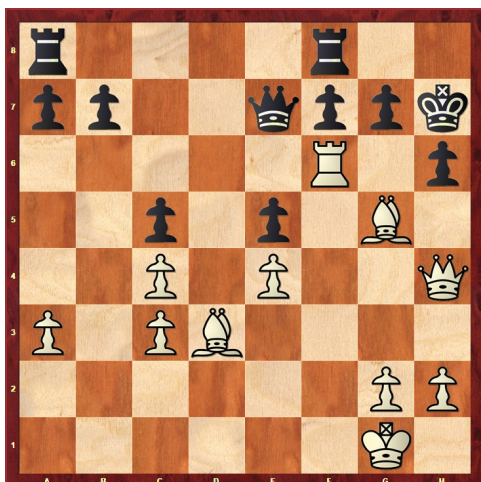


I think there is something aesthetically pleasing about the way the queen tiptoed from e2 to h4. Now Black is under crushing pressure to defend against White's sacrificial threats. Moves like Bxh6 and Bg5 are looming large.

20...Nxd5??

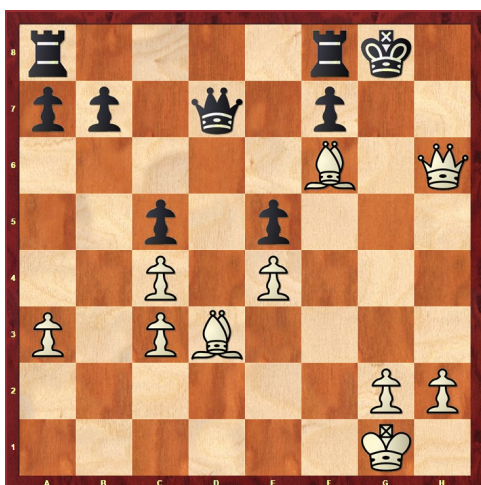
Black goes for an active defense, but it turns out to be a blunder. The only way to try to save the game was the computer's hard-to-find 19...Rh8!, which covers h6 in various critical lines. Who can blame Brent for missing that?

21.Bg5! N5f6 22.Rxf6! Nxf6 23.Rxf6!



A double rook sacrifice—and now the threat is Rxh6+, winning the queen. Really, at this point, Black’s best option is to give up the queen for the rook anyway, but the resulting queen & bishop vs. rooks battle should be technically winning for White.

23...Qd7? 24.Rxh6+! gxh6 25.Qxh6+ Kg8 26.Bf6 1–0



Just when Brent was about to play 26...Qg4 to defend g7, he realized that queen to h8 would also be mate, and therefore resigned.

One last thought: I would like to give a word of encouragement to the young Alabama players who still seek their National Master (or even Original Life Master) title. If you have the talent, you work hard, you are patient and your play is consistent, eventually you can get there. Be aware that if you mostly compete just in Alabama, then your quest will take time. If, however, you are in a rush, you can probably reach your goal faster if you travel to more tournaments in other states or even play in major national events. (Stephen Adams, for example, attained his NM title at the World Open.) But—if I may be so bold to ask—what’s the rush?

Allow me to explain. Some talented young players become chess masters very quickly and easily—maybe after just a few years of play. The chess community rightfully says “Wow!” and puts players like that upon a pedestal. However, I believe there is a dark

side to becoming a chess master so young, so quickly. Namely:

If you become a chess master at a young age, after playing for just a few years, it is almost impossible not to take your chess mastery for granted.

The more I thought about this, the more I realized how true it was. In my experience, the prodigy-types who become instant masters (and *then* hit a plateau) are often the first to become jaded and quit. On the other hand, the players who improve slowly and only achieve their dreams after lengthy, agonizing struggle are much more likely to remain lifelong chess players. Not only do they stay hungry, but also, if they finally achieve that coveted master title, they will enjoy it so much more. To paraphrase Daniel Thomas, "You really appreciate the jewel when you must work harder to mine it from the mountain."

So, if it seems like it is taking you forever to achieve your chess goals, take heart. I was there too, but I finally made it; hopefully, so can you. And I assure you: I will *never* take my master titles for granted.

Not after working this hard for this long to get them! ■

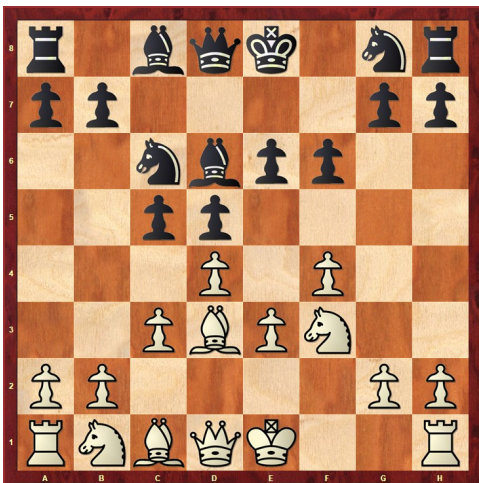
Anthony - Taylor, 1987

by Charles Anthony

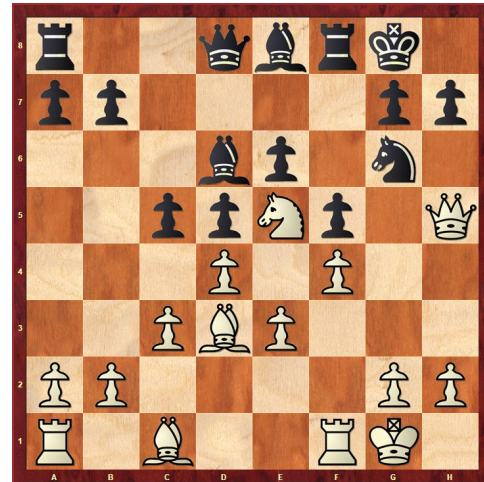
Charles Anthony – Phillip Taylor
(1902) (1854)

Fayette Chess Club Ch., Final Round
10-10-1987

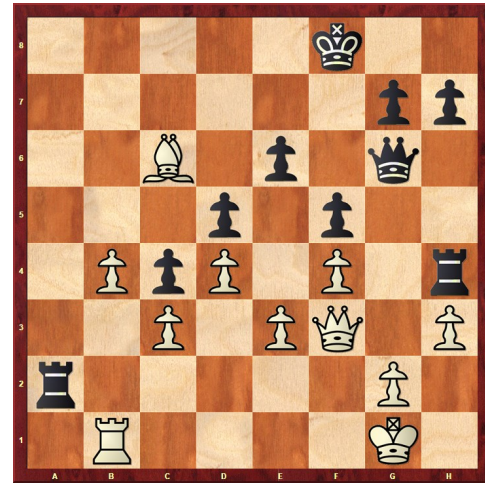
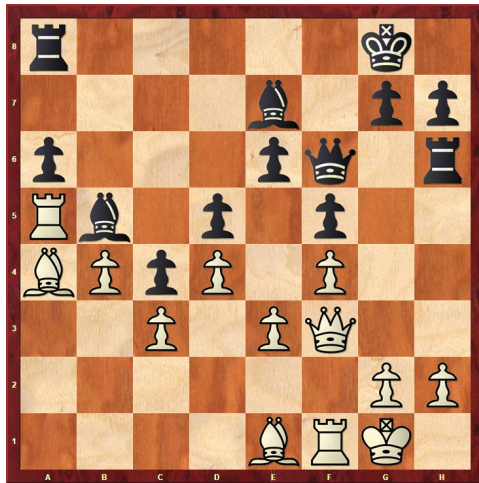
1.d4 d5 2.e3 e6 3.Bd3 c5 4.c3 Nc6
5.f4 Bd6 6.Nf3 f6 Fighting for
control of e5, a pivotal square in the
Stonewall.



7.O-O Nge7 8.Qe1 Ng6 9.Qg3 Nce7
10.Nbd2 Bd7 11.Nh4 Nxh4 12.Qxh4
f5 Black sets up his own stonewall,
ceding e5. 13.Nf3 Heading for e5, a
great outpost for the knight.
13...Ng6 14.Qh5 O-O 15.Ne5 Be8

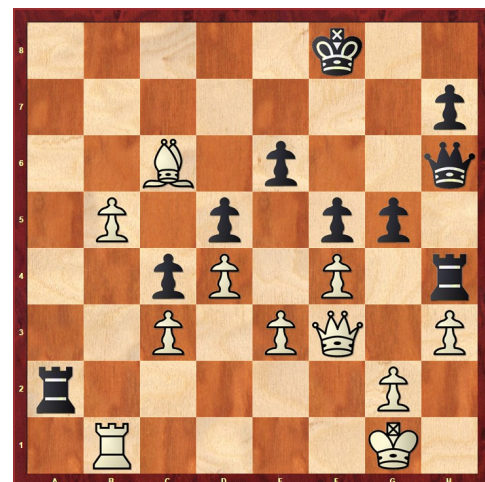


16.Nxg6?! Fearful of the discovered
attack on the queen if 16...Nxe5,
White removes the last knight from
action. 16...Bxg6 17.Qh3 c4 18.Bc2
Black gains a space advantage.
White has a “bad bishop” at c1. That
is one big disadvantage of playing
the Stonewall as White. It takes time
to develop this bishop. 18...Rf6
19.Bd2 Be8 20.Qf3 Rh6 21.Be1 Qf6
22.b4 b5 23.a4 Be7 24.axb5 Bxb5
25.Ra5 a6 26.Ba4? A hasty move.
White is immediately punished.



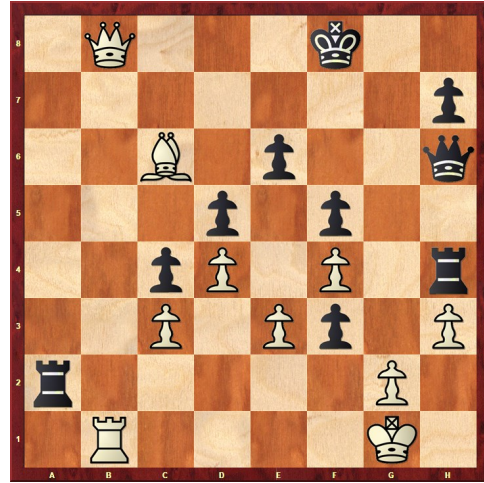
26...Bd8! Winning the exchange.
 27.Rxb5 Getting a bishop and pawn for the rook and creating a passed pawn, which will make the difference in the game. 27...axb5
 28.Bxb5 Qg6 29.Bg3 Bh4 30.Bxh4 Rxh4 31.Bc6 Uncovering the passed pawn while gaining a tempo by attacking the rook. 31...Ra2 Black presses his attack on the king's position. White must calculate carefully to survive. It will take 5 moves to promote the pawn, counting moving the rook over for support. He will have to hold off Black's material superiority for just a little longer. 32.h3 Kf8 33.Rb1 The black king can't get there in time.*

White's plan to promote the pawn will work, if he hasn't counted incorrectly. The rook can't get back to stop the pawn; only the queen can get there, but she is pressing the attack on the white king. 33...Qh6? Now the queen can't get to the back rank to defend. She is fully committed to the attack. 34.b5! The pawn cannot be stopped now! 34...g5



* There is an interesting road-not-taken if Black's king tries to cut off the pawn: 33...Ke7 34.b5 Kd8 35.b6 Kc8 36.Bxd5! exd5 37.Qxd5, with the threats of b7+ as well as Qxc4+ followed by Qxa2. These threats are so potent that the computer insists on bailing out with 37...Rxc2+, simplifying to an ending that is still a bit better for White. -Ed

What? Did I miss something? The mind is racing. Got to calm down and simply do some counting. I have waited 7 long years to win my first Club Champion trophy! Don't want to let this one slip away against the reigning back-to-back Champion! **35.b6** It will involve a queen sacrifice, but it will work! Onward to glory for the pawn! **35...g4 36.b7** Almost! Almost! **36...gxf3** Never fear. She will be resurrected! **37.b8=Q+** and **Black resigned.**



The continuation is a forced win for White. It might go something like this: **37....Kf7 38. Rb7+ Kf6 39. Qd8+ Kg6 40. Be8++.** ■

1987 FAYETTE CHESS CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP

Charles Anthony captured the Fayette Chess Club Championship during National Chess Week at the Fayette Civic Center (site of the 1986 State Championships). Charles won over two-time defending champion and former A.C.F. Vice-President Phillip Taylor, after finishing second to him in 1985 and 1986.

An excerpt from the original Antics report on the 1987 Fayette Chess Club Championship. (May 1988 Antics, p. 17.)

Strout-Dresher

by Doug Strout

D.L. Strout - K. Dresher

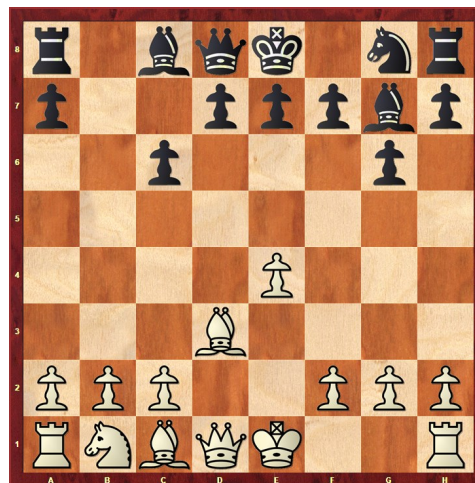
(1436) (1603)

USCF Online Blitz

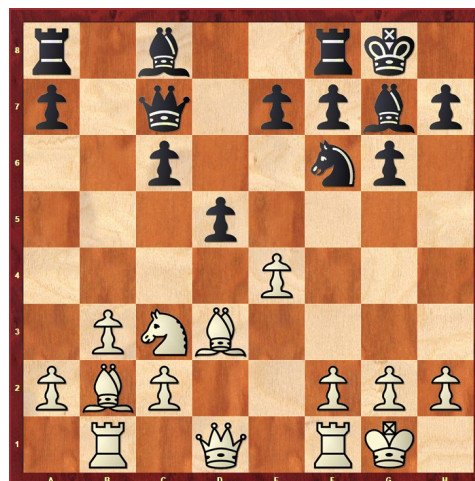
Chess.com

4-20-2020

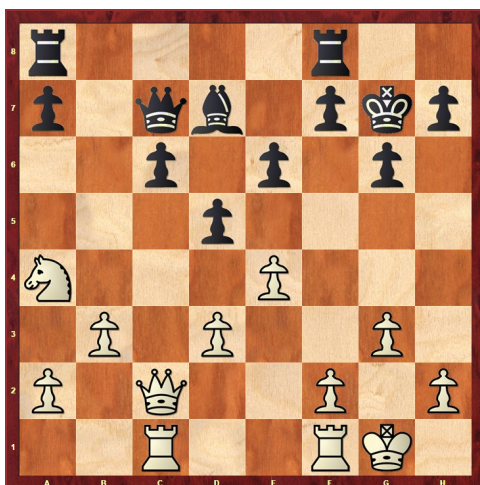
This is a USCF Online Blitz Game/10 played on chess.com on April 20, 2020. The opponent is Kevin Dresher of New Jersey. The ratings are USCF Online Blitz ratings at the time the game was played. This is my fourth straight win/draw against Kevin in USCF blitz, but before that he beat me nine in a row. **1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4** I open 1. e4, he comes back with Sicilian, and I play for the open center. **4...g6 5.Nxc6 bxc6 6.Bd3** I trade the knights. I do that sort of thing a lot. Setting the bishop at d3 allows me to castle next move even if he plays Nf6. **6...Bg7** Yeah. I have to deal with that guy on g7, which could get awkward with the b-file open.



7.0-0 Qc7 8.Nc3 Opening myself to a weakness if he goes for ...Bxc3 bxc3. **8...Nf6 9.Rb1 0-0 10.b3 d5 11.Bb2** By playing ...Nf6 and ...O-O when he did, he gave me time to organize my queenside against both the g7 bishop and a prospective b8 rook.

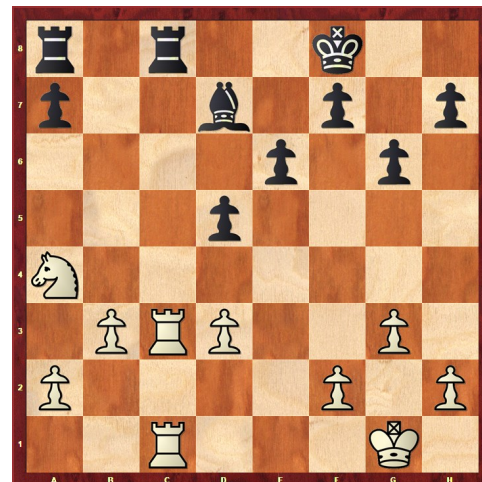


11...Ng4 12.g3 Ne5 13.Na4 Nxd3
 14.Bxg7 I left myself open here to ...Nxf2 Rxf2 Kxg7, but he did not take it. 14...Kxg7 15.cxd3 e6 16.Qc2 Bd7 17.Rbc1 I do have an open c-file against a backward pawn, so I'm powering up against it.

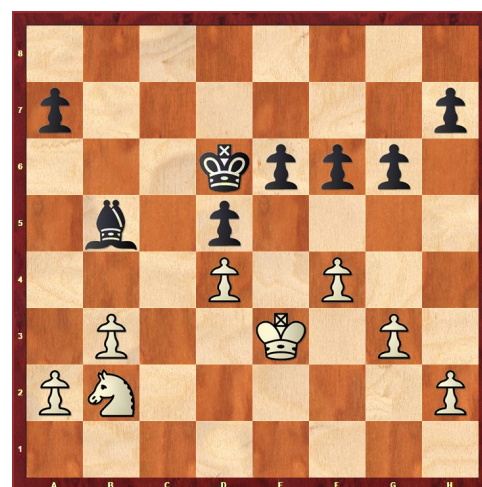


17...Qd6 18.Qc5 Offering a queen trade is stylistic for me, but he doesn't take it. 18...Qe5 19.Qc3 Push d4 or trade queens. There is no third way. 19...Qxc3 20.Rxc3 I get my queen trade, and lift for my rook so I can double up. 20...Rfc8 21.Rfc1 Kf8 22.exd5 Yeah, I know this isolates my d4 pawn, but d4 will be on a closed file. 22...cxd5 Two points here: 1) I'm going to burn the house down at c8, and 2) he has pawns 5-on-4 kingside, but my 2-on-1 queenside will produce an outside

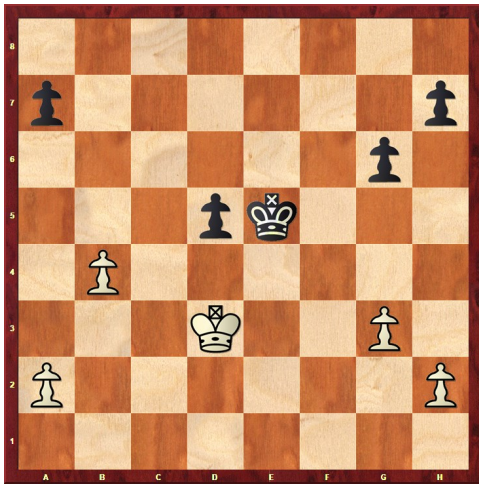
passed pawn.



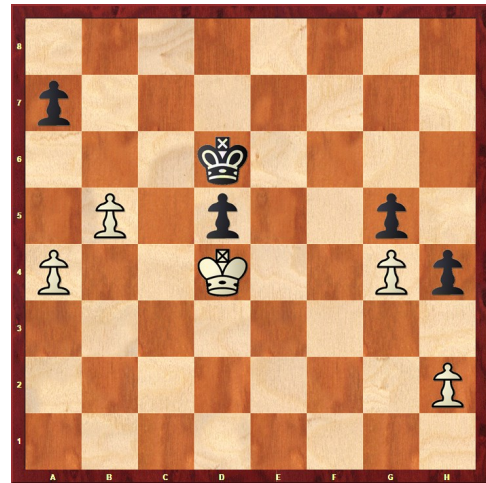
23.Rxc8+ Rxc8 24.Rxc8+ Bxc8 No, by the way, I'm not afraid to play N-vs-B on an open board. 25.f4 Bd7 26.Nb2 Ke7 27.Kf2 Kd6 28.Ke3 f6 This is an interesting decision here. By not playing ...Kc5, he allows me to lock him out of that square. 29.d4 Bb5 I'm not worried. All kingside pawns are on dark squares.



30.b4 e5 The sequence that follows leaves him with a pawn at d5 he cannot promote, and I can still create the outside passer. **31.fxe5+ fxe5 32.dxe5+ Kxe5 33.Nd3+ Bxd3 34.Kxd3**



It's over. I will get the queenside passer, gobble up d5 and head on over kingside for the win. **34...g5 35.a4** I keep the pawn on g3 to lock f4. **35...h5 36.b5 Kd6 37.Kd4 h4 38.g4** This is an important move I think. I want to keep two kingside pawns to guarantee the win. If gxf4 gxf4, my final pawn is a rook pawn that maybe can be stopped. Hard to calculate that all the way out in G/10.



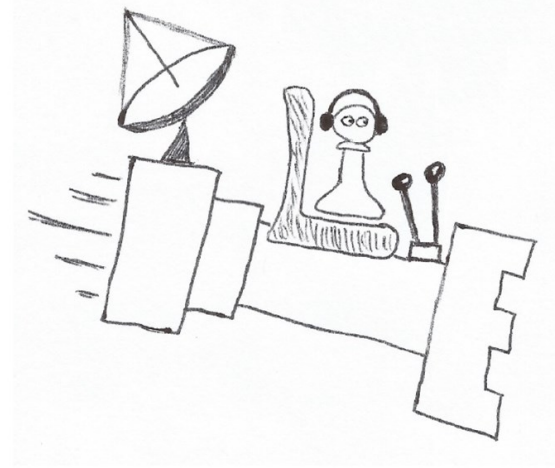
38...h3 39.a5 a6 40.b6 Kc6 41.Ke5 1-0

(Editor's note: another nice performance by Doug in one of his trademark king-and-pawn endings. Having an online blitz game in the Antics is certainly a sign of the times. It is good to see that, in the last several months, many of Alabama's chess players have remained active through online competition.) ■

The Time Machine

by Scott Varagona

We're back again... taking a spin... in the time machine! Let's see what was happening in Alabama chess some 10, 20, 30, and 40 years ago...



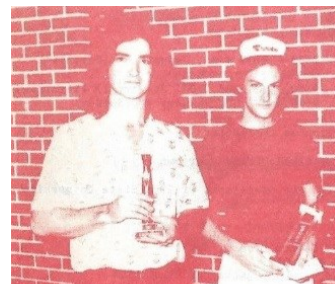
40 years ago, in 1980...

- McGill Toolen High School defended their high school team state title with a 5-0 match score. The members of the team: Faustin Weber, **Tom Denton**, Maria Jurjevich, Robert March, and (the alternate) Jerry Winn. (July 1980 *Antics*)
- The 1980 Alabama Open (i.e., the State Championship) took place in Troy and was won by champion **Steve Hudson** and co-champion **Joe Jurjevich** with 5/6 points each. Behind them, tied at 4/6 points, was a huge pack of players including Stuart Rachels, Kyle Therrell, and Brent Inman. (November 1980 *Antics*)
- **Stuart Rachels** won the Birmingham City Championship final match against Steve Hudson. Stuart was ten years old at the time. (November 1980 *Antics*)



Above: Tom Denton in 1981.
(Photo from August '81 *Antics*.)

Below: The 1980 Alabama champions were Joe Jurjevich (left) and Steve Hudson (right). (Photo from November '80 *Antics*.)



30 years ago, in 1990...

- **Bill Melvin** tied for first (with Edwin Battistella) to win the 1990 Magic City Open. (March 1990 *Antics*)
- **Bill Melvin** won clear first place (with 5/6) at the 1990 Alabama State Championship, finishing ahead of players such as Daniel Miller and Charles Meidinger. This would be the first of many state titles for Bill... (vol. 1 1991 *Antics*)
- **Luis Morenilla** won the 1990 Huntsville Championship with a perfect 5/5 score. (vol. 1 1991 *Antics*)

20 years ago, in 2000...

- **Stephen Muhammad** of Georgia won the 28th Queen of Hearts tournament with 4.5/5. (May-July 2000 *Antics*)
- **Scott Varagona** won the Alabama Scholastic Individual Chess Championship (Open Section) and represented Alabama in the Denker Tournament of High School Champions.
- **Bill Melvin** became the 2000 Alabama State Champion after a particularly tense and dramatic tournament that began with a "Swiss Gambit"! (November 2000 *Antics*)

10 years ago, in 2010...

- **IM Emory Tate** got clear first at the Queen of Hearts, the Alabama State Championship, and the Space City Open.
- At the Alabama Scholastic Individual Championships (Open Section), **Jeffrey Byrd** won the tiebreaker over Ryan Brown to become Alabama's Denker nominee for the second year in a row. ■

2020 Alabama Dual-Rated Chess Championship

by Doug Strout

Fourteen players competed in the Alabama Dual-Rated Chess Championship held at Evangel Church in Montgomery. Players from Georgia, Tennessee, and New York competed in the event. The tournament was directed by Doug Strout.

Thanks to all the players for supporting the event, and congratulations to the winners. Players are from Alabama unless noted otherwise.

OPEN

ALABAMA DUAL-RATED STATE CHAMPION: **Isaac Snow**

2nd place: Tim Bond

U2000 winner: Roy Weaver (Georgia)

U1800

1st place: Henry Veys (Tennessee)

2nd place/U1500 winner (tie):

Dan Williams (ALABAMA U1800 DUAL-RATED STATE CHAMPION)

and Maria Poulos-Chachere (New York)

U1200

ALABAMA U1200 DUAL-RATED STATE CHAMPION: **Daniel Seewald**

2nd place/U1000 winner (tie): Paul Laymon and Doug Seewald

Next up at Evangel is the 2020 Alabama Quick & Blitz Championship on August 22. See flyer on alabamachess.org. ■

ALABAMA
CHESS
ANTICS

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Alabama Chess
Federation

Upcoming Tournaments

Important Note: Any in-person tournaments listed here (or on the ACF website) are tentative, and may be subject to change or cancellation due to coronavirus concerns. See www.alabamachess.org for updates on these and other events.

August 22 Alabama Quick & Blitz Championship Montgomery, AL
September 5-6 2020 Alabama State Championship (Online)

The **Alabama Chess Federation** (ACF) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and the United States Chess Federation affiliate for the state of Alabama. Our goal is to promote chess in this area for the benefit of all Alabama players. Toward that end, we provide advertising and other assistance for rated tournaments, as well as support for scholastic chess programs around the state.

To submit articles, pictures and games to the *Antics*, email the *Antics* editor at

Alabama.Chess.Editor@gmail.com

Games in .pgn format are strongly preferred.

Please contact president@alabamachess.org if you are interested in helping with the Alabama Chess Federation.

All chess diagrams in this issue were produced using *Fritz*, a program by *ChessBase*.

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