

*Alabama Chess
Hall of Fame*

- Class of 2021 -



Lars Edmond Britt

Alabama Chess Hall of Fame 2021

Lars Britt is a significant individual in the history of Alabama chess, particularly in the documentation and recording of Alabama chess history from the mid-1970s to the turn of the century. He attended Murphy High School in Mobile, Alabama, and promoted chess for much of his adult life. He directed the historic Mobile-Baldwin County Chess League for some 20+ years, and directed over 100 tournaments. He served as chief editor of the Alabama Chess Federation's quarterly published *Alabama Chess Antics* from 1978 to 1988, before the era of desktop publishing. He had a peak rating in the 1800's.

The Mobile-Baldwin County Chess League has been in continual existence since the 1970-71 school year (now 50 years!), in which local high schools have met and competed for the league title at numerous league matches held throughout the school year. Lars played for Murphy in the first year of the league. It wasn't long until he took over direction of the league, in the mid-1970s. Under his direction, the league thrived and grew and produced many of the state's strong chess players and the first Alabama representatives at the Denker Tournament of High School Champions. During that era, Mobile was the center of scholastic chess in the state, and Lars also directed over a dozen of the State Scholastic Team Championship tournaments. The results of the league and State tournament were routinely documented and reported by Lars as editor of the *Antics*, including photos of the winners (often on the cover) and taken during play. (These old *Antics* have thankfully been scanned and preserved in PDF form for viewing today on the ACF webpage.)

In addition to editing and publishing the *Antics*, Lars wrote and submitted articles on chess happenings to the *Mobile Press Register* regularly for years (archived on microfiche). But the labor of the *Antics* included typing up the articles, formatting, copying, stapling, addressing, stamping, and mailing them to the tune of some 250 copies, four or five times a year for over a decade. The pages within included tournament results, ads for coming tournaments, photos with captions, and annotated games submitted by players. A truly rich archive of Alabama chess history. Lars also worked in the arts, and this skill came out in the flair of creativity expressed in the *Antics*.

The late '70s and the 1980s was a time of colorful characters on the Mobile chess scene, and nicknames for players became common. Lars became known as "Blazing Diagonals" after a game in which Lars' bishops blazed away on the diagonals of his opponent. (This game was published in the *Antics*.)

Lars passed away in August of 2016. In tribute to Lars, and in recognition of all the tremendous work he did on behalf of the Mobile-Baldwin County Chess League, the league members voted unanimously to name an award in his honor. The top Varsity 1st Board player wins The Paul Morphy Award (as Mr. Morphy attended Spring Hill College in Mobile) and the top Middle School 1st Board player wins The Lars Britt Memorial Award. One person said it well: that Lars gave much of himself so that others could enjoy playing chess.



Joseph Jurjevich

Alabama Chess Hall of Fame 2021

Joe Jurjevich, “the Bay Minette Flash,” is a five-time Alabama State Chess Champion with a chess career spanning nearly fifty years. He is a National Master and one of Alabama’s perennial weekend warriors.

After becoming an Alabama State Co-Champion for the first time in the year 1980, Jurjevich began winning tournaments regularly throughout the state. Some of his notable early successes include ties for first at the 1981 Vulcan Open and the 1982 North Alabama Open; he also tied for first at the Pensacola Beach Opens of 1980, 1981, and 1982.

In the summer of 1985, Jurjevich attained the National Master title after a series of strong performances in the Washington D.C. area. In 1989, he won his second Alabama State Championship—this time with a perfect 6-0 score.

Subsequently, Jurjevich won or shared the state title again in 2002, 2006, and 2008. He has also won or tied for first at other prominent tournaments such as the Chris Bond Memorial (in 2006, 2008, and 2018) and the Queen of Hearts (in 2014).

Jurjevich has a deserved reputation as a dangerous attacker. He is known for his tactical style and his resourcefulness in difficult positions. He excels in sharp 1.e4 openings with White and double-edged defenses like the Benoni with Black; he often confronts his opponents with unpleasant problems—or even deadly traps—right out of the opening. He is also known for being a speed demon: he won the Alabama Speed Chess Championship in 1984, tied for first at the Alabama Quick Chess Championship in 2010, and won the Alabama Blitz Championship in 2020.



Caesar Lawrence

Alabama Chess Hall of Fame 2021

(Caesar (left) being presented commendation by Governor Bentley in 2014)

Caesar Lawrence is the most prominent organizer and tournament director in Alabama Chess history. Since moving to Alabama from Alaska in 1995, he has been Chief TD in 423 events as of 2021. He started Caesar Chess in September 2009 and devoted himself full-time to coaching, organizing, and tournament directing.

Caesar has had success at the chessboard beating multiple Masters in rated games, obtaining the Class A norm-based title, and having a peak rating of 1916. He has played in 184 events since moving to Alabama as of 2021.

The Alabama Chess Federation has been supported by Caesar who served as Vice President from 1998 to 2004, and Caesar has contributed mightily to the continuity of Alabama's most important tournaments. An impressive example was organizing the well-attended Queen of Hearts in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Few organizers in the country were willing to organize a multi-day event requiring masks and social distancing, but Caesar managed to keep the long streak of Queen of Hearts tournaments alive. Caesar has uplifted Alabama chess through his coaching as well: two of his former chess students represented Alabama at the National Denker Tournament of High School Champions.

This Hall of Fame honor may not be the biggest chess honor bestowed upon Caesar. In 2014, the Alabama Senate passed a Joint Resolution "Recognizing the Work and Results of Caesar Lawrence, Alabama's Scholastic Chess Coach and Tournament Director." This reward was bestowed upon Caesar by Alabama's Governor. The U.S. Chess Federation recognized this achievement at the national level.



Charles Meidinger

Alabama Chess Hall of Fame 2021

Charles Meidinger is a five-time Alabama State Chess Champion and one of Huntsville's all-time greatest players. After fighting his way up through the rating list in the late 1970s, Charles attained the National Master title—and secured his place among Alabama's elite players—in the 1980s. He then won or shared the Alabama State Champion title in 1991, 1992, 1994, 2002, and 2012. Most notably, in 1994, he won the Alabama State Championship with a sensational 7-0 score; this performance makes him the only Alabamian to achieve a perfect score at the state championship in the last three decades. His peak rating was 2286.

Charles is also one of Alabama's great examples of chess longevity. In a chess career that spans over 40 years, Charles has won Huntsville City Championships, Space City Opens, and many other tournaments in Alabama and the Southeast. Most recently, he took clear first at the 2019 Huntsville Open Championship, and he won a prize for best first board at the 2020 U.S. Amateur Team South. He has also represented Alabama in the National Tournament of Senior State Champions.

In terms of chess style, when playing at his best, Charles can patiently grind down any potential rival in Alabama. Charles can also be commended for his versatility: he can play solid Queen Pawn Openings as White, but also sharp and tactical Sicilian Defenses as Black. Indeed, with either color and in every tournament, Charles is always a fierce fighter—but, at the same time, a model sportsman—at the chessboard.



Stuart Rachels

Alabama Chess Hall of Fame 2021

Stuart Rachels is Alabama's greatest player of the 20th century. He is a five-time Alabama State Champion, a U.S. Junior Champion, a U.S. Co-Champion, and an International Master.

After his family moved to Alabama in the late 1970s, Stuart learned the rules of chess at age 8. He played in his first tournament in 1979 and quickly began to improve. He had already become one of Alabama's top ten players, and won the Birmingham City Championship, in 1980. His true potential as a chess prodigy was revealed when, in the summer of 1981, he became the youngest ever U.S. National Master up to that point, at the age of 11 years and 10 months old.

Stuart's record-breaking National Master title would be followed by many more successes, both at the state and national level, throughout the 1980s. For example, Stuart became an Alabama State Champion for five consecutive years (1982-1986) and a Birmingham City Champion for four consecutive years (1983-1986); he won numerous other notable Alabama tournaments, such as the Vulcan Open, the Space City Open, the Magic City Open, and the Queen of Hearts. He also proved himself to be one of the best junior players in the country by tying for first at the 1982 U.S. Junior High Championship, and then tying for first at the 1982 U.S. Junior Open.

In 1988, Stuart won the U.S. Junior Championship and qualified to play in the 1989 U.S. Championship. He entered that U.S. Championship as a considerable underdog: he was an FM in a field teeming with GMs. However, Stuart defied all odds and played his greatest tournament ever, tying for first (with Seirawan and Dzindzichashvili) at +4 to become a U.S. Co-Champion. Stuart was awarded the International Master title for this performance. He also qualified to play in the 1990 Interzonal tournament, where he competed among past and future chess legends such as Tal, Smyslov, Korchnoi, Short, Gelfand, Ivanchuk, and Anand.

After reaching the summit of American chess, attaining a USCF rating over 2600, and proving he could compete on equal terms with some of the world's elite players, Stuart retired from competitive chess in 1993. Although his chess career was relatively short, his status as an Alabama chess legend will last forever.

In addition to his achievements over the board, Stuart is also known and respected for his chess writings. Even from a young age, he often contributed articles to *Alabama Chess Antics*. Much more recently, Stuart wrote a book called *The Best I Saw in Chess* (published by New in Chess in 2020) filled with stories and games from his chess career. This book is a treasure trove of 1980s Alabama chess history—and, of course, Stuart made much of that history himself. *The Best I Saw in Chess* won a Chess Journalists of America award for "Best Book" of 2020.