

ALABAMA CHESS HALL OF FAME

Class of 2022



Milan Momic

Alabama Chess Hall of Fame 2022

Milan Momic is known as Alabama's first National Master. He was the most powerful force in Alabama in the 1960s and early 1970s; with a peak rating in the 2300s, he towered over his contemporaries. In 1967, *Chess Life* listed him among the top 50 players in the country.

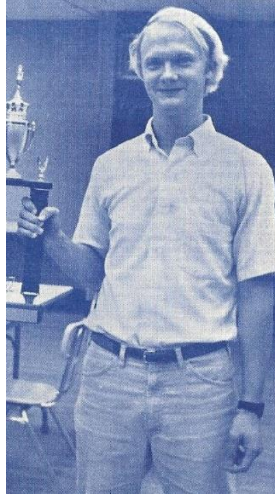
Born in Slovenia in 1935, Momic learned to play chess at age 17. He won the Croatian Junior Chess Championship in 1954 and then fled from communist Yugoslavia in 1955. After settling in Alabama in 1961, Momic immediately made a huge impact on the state's chess scene. He won the Alabama Open with a 7-0 score in 1962 and repeated this feat in 1963, thus becoming the first player to win back-to-back Alabama State Champion titles. He went on to win countless tournaments in Alabama throughout the 1960s and early 1970s: for example, he won the Alabama Open once again in 1966, and he won the 3rd annual Queen of Hearts in 1975.

Many of Momic's greatest triumphs happened at notable tournaments in other states. For example, he won the inaugural Georgia State Open in 1963. Ten years later, at the 1973 Continental Open in Atlanta, Momic famously defeated Walter Browne with a brilliant sacrificial attack.

Momic was also especially successful in Tennessee: he won five Tennessee Opens (in 1964, 1968, 1970, 1973 & 1974) and several Mid-South Opens.

In 1971, Momic won the Southern Open—also known then as the "Region IV Championship"—in Birmingham, thus making him the de facto champion of the entire Southeast.

Sadly, in 1975, Momic's chess career was cut short by a workplace accident that impaired his memory, and thus, impaired his chess-playing ability. He retired from competitive tournament play in 1975, and then passed away in 1997. Still, although his chess career was relatively brief, and many of his successes happened over fifty years ago, Milan Momic's legendary achievements are still remembered and celebrated by Alabama's chess players today.



Kyle Therrell

Alabama Chess Hall of Fame 2022

Kyle Therrell is a five-time Alabama State Champion and a Birmingham chess legend. From his first state championship victory in 1981 until he retired in the early 2000s, he always remained one of the very top players of Alabama. His peak rating was in the 2300s.

Kyle's chess career began in the 1970s. In 1976, he won the Alabama High School Championship at age 12 and became one of the top five players under 13 in the nation. He also had some early success in "adult" chess in Alabama when he won the Vulcan Open in 1979.

However, Kyle's real breakthrough in Alabama chess happened in 1981, when he became Birmingham City Champion for the first time. A few months later, he got clear first place (with 6/7) at the 1981 Alabama State Championship. He soon became a National Master as well.

With his solid playing style and detailed opening knowledge, Kyle significantly outclassed nearly everyone in Alabama for two decades. During his period of dominance in the 1980s and 1990s, Kyle became an Alabama State Champion five times (in 1981, 1982, 1987, 1992, and 1995) and won or tied for first in countless other Alabama tournaments. His various Queen of Hearts victories include three wins in a row in 1982, 1983, and 1984.

Kyle is noted for winning more Birmingham City Championships than anyone else in recorded history. His successes in this competition include a memorable championship match win over Stuart Rachels in 1981 and a long streak of successful title defenses in the 1990s.

In addition, Kyle will be remembered as being one of Stuart Rachels' most important mentors. Many great battles between these two titans of 1980s Alabama chess can be found in Stuart Rachels' book, *The Best I Saw in Chess*.



Bill Melvin

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Bill Melvin is one of the very strongest and most successful Alabama chess players of all time. He was Alabama's most dominant player of the 1990s, winning tournament after tournament with daring play, and he has remained one of Alabama's top ten rated players for over three decades.

So far, Bill has become an Alabama State Champion eight times: he won or shared the state title in 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, and 2016. For many years, Bill held the record for the most state titles. He has become Huntsville City Champion numerous times and has won countless other traditional Alabama tournaments, such as the Queen of Hearts, Magic City Open, Vulcan Open, and Space City Open. He has also earned the National Master, Original Life Master, and Norm-Based Life Master titles. His peak USCF rating was 2334.

Beyond his competitive successes, Bill has also contributed to Alabama chess culture through chess mentoring, tournament direction, and organizational leadership. Most notably, he served as ACF president during 1996-1999 and 2000-2004. In addition, he has authored more than 60 articles for the state chess magazine, *Alabama Chess Antics*.

Bill has a sharp, tactical style of play that welcomes chaotic positions and unusual material imbalances. He also has a talent for bouncing back from difficult positions: he often survives—and wins—games that other players would give up as hopelessly lost.



Scott Varagona

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In just over 20 years, Scott Varagona already holds nearly every record for Alabama tournament success. His current rating peak is 2293 and has been consistently above 2250 since earning the Master title in 2012. He earned the Original Life Master title (300 Games as a Master) in 2019. Scott has a solid and tenacious style of play with an opening repertoire that he understands and suits his style. His game has no real weaknesses and has proven to be dominant within Alabama for two decades and counting.

Scott's contributions go far beyond playing chess. He took over as Editor of the *Alabama Chess Antics* in 2008. Using modern tools to publish to the internet, the quality of the *Antics* met or exceeded any of his predecessors. He has authored many historical articles about Alabama chess and instructively annotated dozens of chess games.

His biggest contribution may be his quest to obtain and digitize issues of the *Antics* that existed before the computer age. Surviving copies of many of these issues have proven elusive. Scott has been relentless in his pursuit and has had many long-time players digging through the back of their closets searching for lost gems. This initiative has paid off handsomely with only a handful of remaining gaps.

Scott won the Alabama State Scholastic Championship in 2000 by two full points. He represented Alabama distinctively in the 2000 Denker tournament of High School champions where he lost a single game, finished tied for 10th place, and gained 60 rating points.

Scott is still winning Alabama's top tournaments, so any list of tournament successes is soon to be outdated. As of 2022, this list includes:

- Alabama State Championship (10 Championships): 2002, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020
- Queen of Hearts (8 Championships): 2006, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016
- Vulcan (5 Championships): 2001, 2002, 2014, 2015, 2019
- Magic City Classic (5 Championships): 2010, 2013, 2015, 2018, 2019
- Alabama Quick Championship (8 Championships): 2010, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2022
- Alabama Blitz Championship (5 Championships): 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018
- Alabama Dual Rated Championship (6 Championships): 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2021, 2022