



The Official
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Alabama Chess
Federation

Alabama Chess Antics

Spring 2026

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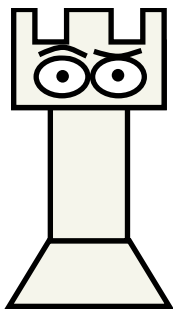
by Charles Anthony



Bon voyage, Bill Melvin! The Alabama chess community bids you a grateful goodbye as you move away. We wish you all the best.

(Photo from Spring 2004 Antics.)

Greetings from the Editor



Howdy, folks! It took me a long time to finish this *Antics*, but it's finally done. Thank you all for your patience. As you can see, we are still using the same Microsoft Publisher format for now, but in this volume we introduce a different style of chess diagrams. These were made using open source tools available in lichess.org. I really like the look and feel of the new diagrams; hopefully you will too.

At last, all the tiebreaks after the State Scholastic Championships have concluded, and now we know the names of all the scholastic representatives to the national tournaments of champions. See page 4 for a summary of these results. (A nice article on the State Scholastic Championship itself may be found on alabamachess.org.) In addition, I should mention that our Senior Championship winner, **Tom Denton**, has become Alabama's Irwin tournament representative for 2026; Tom wrote an article about his two most crowd-pleasing games from the Senior Championship for this *Antics*. We also have a new article by one of the *Antics'* most loyal contributors, **Charles Anthony**, featuring an instructive Stonewall Attack. Thanks to everybody who helped make this *Antics* possible.

For the second year in a row, Alabama is now home to a world champion: **IM Stuart Rachels** played on the American team that won the 2026 World Senior Team Championship. I have a brief article about Stu's performance as the U.S. team's player #5. And—since I always have to write an article where I go completely overboard, diving head-first into chess history—I reflected deeply on my huge rivalry with **Bill Melvin**, whose long Alabama chess career is finally coming to a close as he moves out of state. We'll miss you, Bill!

Check the tournament calendar: there are lots of different events going on in Alabama in the coming weeks and months, so take advantage of these opportunities to play when and where you can. And if you have a good story or photo to share, let the *Antics* know! The deadline for *Antics* submissions for Summer 2026 (email: Alabama.Chess.Editor@gmail.com) is August 5.

Kindest regards,
-Scott Varagona (6-15-2026)

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.

Alabama Chess Leaderboard

Top 50 Regular Ratings (retrieved from ratings.uschess.org on 6/15/2026)

Only USCF members with rating activity within the past year are listed.

1	IM STUART RACHELS	2497	26	RANDY COPE	1855
2	STEPHEN ADAMS	2266	27	JEFF TOBIN	1836
3	SCOTT VARAGONA	2259	28	SAIKARUNYA KESIREDDY	1835
4	MATTHEW PUCKETT	2230	29	ROBERT LUBIN	1814
5	BILL MELVIN	2200	30	TIMOTHY TAYLOR	1795
6	KEVIN WANG	2184	31	SHAWN CHOI	1790
7	ZACHARY ISAAC SNOW II	2117	32	JOSHUA WAKEFIELD	1781
8	CHRISTIAN FRIEDMAN	2115	33	PATRICK DOWD	1775
9	AARON DECORD	2101	34	MARK CONLEY	1754
10	BRIAN LANKEY	2087	35	IAN LOWTHER	1753
11	GORDON RANDALL	2087	36	YAN ZHU	1746
12	CHIBUZO ILONZE	2083	37	KENNETH GOODMAN	1738
13	JOSIAH HEREFORD	2082	38	ARITRA BISWAS	1731
14	STEPHEN GRAVELING	2081	39	RHODES PEELE	1726
15	XAVIER BRUNI	2073	40	ETHAN SMITH	1713
16	THOMAS DENTON	2052	41	KEVIN JUDICE	1696
17	MICHAEL PORCELLI	2011	42	SARAH PETER	1671
18	CHARLES MEIDINGER	2000	43	WILLIAM SAVOIE	1658
19	BRENT INMAN	2000	44	KENDALL FRANKS	1657
20	PRESTON SMITH	1956	45	DOUGLAS STROUT	1643
21	SAMUEL BASKARRAJ	1943	46	XAVIER RODRIGUEZ	1640
22	ALISHER KHASANOV	1941	47	JONATHAN SANCHEZ	1616
23	FRANK JOHNSON	1926	48	CHRISTOPHER LASKY	1614
24	CODY SMITH	1920	49	BRIAN JOHNSON	1607
25	JEFFREY BYRD	1893	50	ARUSH BATCHU	1592

The Alabama State Scholastic Champions

from Todd Guthrie, Caesar Lawrence & uschess.org

HIGH SCHOOL CO-CHAMPIONS

Samuel Baskarraaj & Alisher Khasanov, 4/5

Playoff winner: Samuel Baskarraaj

MIDDLE SCHOOL CHAMPION

Arush Batchu, 4.5/5

ELEMENTARY CHAMPION

Milan Malak*, 5/5

PRIMARY CO-CHAMPIONS

Yuan Su & Bode Atkins, 4/5

Playoff winner: Yuan Su

HIGH SCHOOL U1300 CHAMPION

Krishna Patil, 4.5/5

MIDDLE SCHOOL U1100 CO-CHAMPIONS

Arjun Arora & Devmith Sivurupitiya, 4.5/5

ELEMENTARY U700 CHAMPION

Snigdha Pati, 5/5

PRIMARY U400 CO-CHAMPIONS

Alexander Thrasher & Shrihan Patlori, 5/5

Full results available at <https://ratings.uschess.org/event/202603080713>. ■

* Because Milan Malak is not available to play in the Rockefeller tournament, the Elementary Championship's second-place finisher Aryaa Sathees is Alabama's Rockefeller representative.

2026 Alabama Senior Chess Championship

by Scott Varagona; photos and crosstable from TD Caesar Lawrence

Ten intrepid warriors showed up to do battle at the Alabama Senior Chess Championship held at the University of Montevallo on April 18. As in previous years, I was the host and co-organized the event with TD Caesar Lawrence as part of the “Montevallo Chess Festival.”

The defending champion, IM Stuart Rachels, was absent this year because he was playing in the World Senior Team Championship overseas. Just when it seemed the tournament would be “wide open” for anyone to snatch first place, the formidable Peter Bereolos (2245) showed up out of the blue from Tennessee. Since Bereolos was from out of state, he was not eligible to win the title, but he could still throw a wrench in somebody else’s tournament...

However, Mobile’s **Tom Denton**

refused to go along with this narrative: he defied the odds and won the championship with a 4-0 score. This is now his third Alabama Senior Champion title and probably his best performance at this event so far. Particularly noteworthy was his sacrificial attack against Charles Meidinger in Round 2 and his upset victory against Bereolos in Round 3. (See Tom’s article on page 7.)

Yet Tom Denton’s win against Bereolos wasn’t the biggest upset of the event. That honor goes to Marc Edge, who defeated NM Brent Inman in Round 3—despite a rating difference of 815 points between them. It was a delight to hear Marc’s tale about this dramatic game after the tournament was over: in a tough position, he found a plan that gave him counterplay and, in his words, he would “ride this horse



The ten 2026 Senior Championship participants. Left to right: Scott Kassan, Peter Bereolos, Paul Laymon, Charles Meidinger, Marc Edge, Ken Goodman, Randall Tew, Brent Inman, Tom Denton, and Mike Ward. (Photo by TD Caesar Lawrence.)

until it dies!” In the end, he rode it all the way to victory.

In the last round, Tom Denton sealed the deal (winning against Ken Goodman) to earn his spot as Alabama’s representative at the next Irwin Tournament of Senior Champions. Peter Bereolos defeated Charles Meidinger in a long, *long* rook endgame to take second place with 3/4. Scott Kassan, who’d had a slow start, finished with a solid 2.5 points and won the Class C & D prize. Marc Edge and Ken Goodman both finished with 2 points to earn the Class E & F and Class A & B prizes, respectively. Full results can be found in the tournament crosstable below.

Many thanks to the participants, to TD Caesar Lawrence, and to UM’s College of Arts and Sciences for giving us space to host the event. We hope to see you all next year. ■



Top: First place finisher Tom Denton with his Mobile Chess Club “groupies”! Bottom Left: Second Place finisher Peter Bereolos. Bottom Right: Class E & F prizewinner Marc Edge. Photos by TD Caesar Lawrence.

2026 MONTEVALLO CHESS FESTIVAL: 2026 ALABAMA SENIOR CHAMPIONSHIP -- Standings

#	Place	Name	ID	Rating	Post	St	Rd 1	Rd 2	Rd 3	Rd 4	Total	T-Mod	T-Solk	T-Cum	T-Op.	Prize
1	1	Thomas J Denton	10240352	2020	2077	AL	W3	W4	W2	W6	4.0	7.5	9.5	10	25.5	250.00/1st
2	2	Peter Bereolos	11414966	2245	2238	TN	W8	W7	L1	W4	3.0	8	9	8	22	150.00/2nd
3	3	Scott Kassan	30632514	1295	1327	AL	L1	D10	W8	W5	2.5	7	7.5	4.5	17.5	100.00/Class C&D
4	4-7	Charles Meidinger	10237114	2015	2004	AL	W5	L1	W6	L2	2.0	5	11	6	30	
5		Marc Edge	12433622	1185	1258	AL	L4	W9	W7	L3	2.0	4	7.5	5	17.5	100.00/Class E&F
6		Kenneth W Goodman	12435248	1747	1739	AL	W10	W8	L4	L1	2.0	3	7.5	7	18.5	100.00/Class A&B
7		Brent Inman	11337546	2000	1971	AL	W9	L2	L5	W10	2.0	3	6.5	5	16.5	
8	8-9	Mike Ward	30540006	1316	1296	AL	L2	L6	L3	W9	1.0	5.5	8.5	1	21.5	
9		Paul K Laymon	12610673	987	988	AL	L7	L5	W10	L8	1.0	3.5	5.5	2	12.5	
10	10	Randall D Tew	12808659	888	891	AL	L6	D3	L9	L7	0.5	5	7.5	1.5	18.5	

My Best Games from the Alabama Senior Championship 2026

by Tom Denton

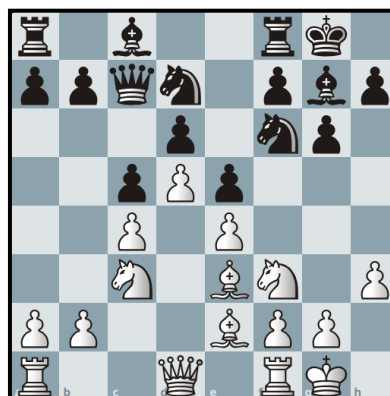
First of all, let me tell you what a great and fun tournament this was. Caesar always runs a smooth event with top prizes and class prizes for all playing levels. He also brings in lunch for the competitors. He and Scott Varagona, the tournament's host, make it a very enjoyable experience for all who come. You should consider joining us next year! I am grateful for people like Scott and Caesar that make sacrifices for the Alabama chess community.

Here I submit my second-round game against National Master Charles Meidinger and my third-round game against FIDE Master Peter Bereolos. The games are not perfect, but I tried my best to play bravely and patiently, focusing on the current move only.

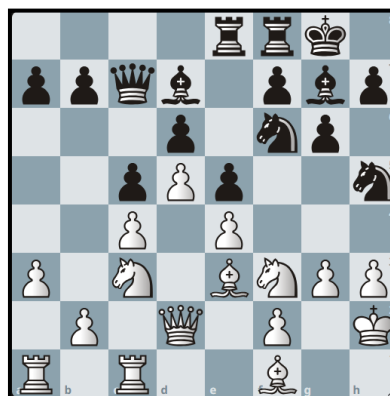
NM Charles Meidinger – Tom Denton
(2000) (2000)

Alabama Senior Ch. 2026, Round 2
Montevallo, AL; 4-18-2026

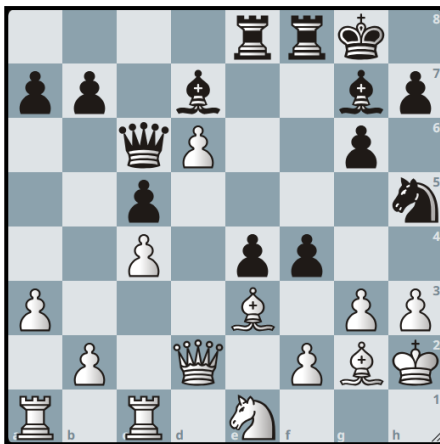
1.d4 d6 I had been playing b6 and thought I would mix things up. **2.Nf3 g6 3.c4 Bg7 4.Nc3 Nd7 5.e4 c6 6.Be2 Qc7 7.O-O Ngf6 8.h3 O-O 9.Be3 e5 10.d5 c5**



This was a poor choice. For some reason, I was afraid of white's possible build-up on the d-file. The move ...a5 is much more in line with this structure. **11.a3 Nh5 12.Re1 Nf4 13.Bf1 Nf6 14.Kh2 Bd7 15.Qd2 Rae8** Here I offer white a pawn (16.Bxf4 exf4 17.Qxf4), but I felt this would give me a good initiative. I can develop quickly by targeting the queen. **16.g3** Black declines. **16...N4h5 17.Rec1** Much better here was b4, since is black not ready for all of the pawns advancing.

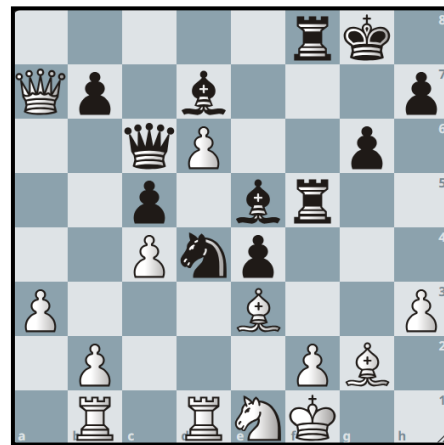


Black is cramped here and needs to break out. **17...Nxe4** Offering a knight. Not the best move according to Stockfish, but the surprise factor is worth something, right? **18.Nxe4 f5** Threatening the knight on e4 and, after the knight moves, having the idea of ...f4 trapping the bishop. **19.Nxc5** This is logical but not nearly as good as **19.Neg5 f4 20.Bxf4 exf4 21.g4 Nf6 22.Re1 Qc8** (Stockfish). **19...dxc5 20.d6 Qc6 21.Bg2** Better is **21.Qd5+** trading queens. **21...e4 21...f4** is also a good way to go. **22.Ne1 f4** This offers white a pawn again, since he has three pieces covering that square and I only have two. The bad news is that black can follow that series of captures with ...Be5 pinning the queen.



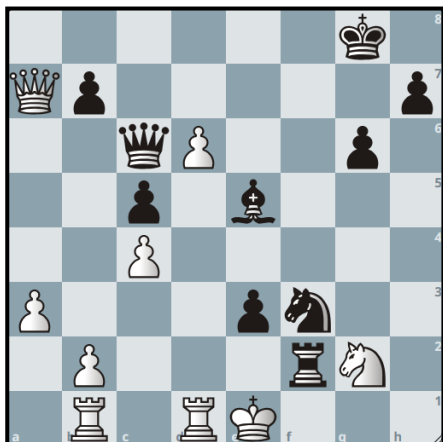
23.gxf4 Nxf4 Offering the knight, but see the comment above. **24.Rd1 Be5 25.Kg1 Rf5** Black eyes doubling rooks and possibly attacking on the g-file. **26.Rab1 Ref8 27.Qa5** The move b4 is much better again. The queen move

says that white is not believing any attack will materialize. **27...Ne2+ 28.Kf1 Nd4** Best is **28...Bd4 29.Rxd4 (29.Kxe2 Rxf2+ 30.Bxf2 Rxf2#) cxd4 30.Qc7 dxe3 31.Kxe2 Rxf2+ 32.Kxe3 Qa4 33.Bxe4 Bc6 34.b3 Qxa3** (Stockfish). **29.Qxa7 Qc7** is better: an effort to exchange queens when yours is inferior.



29...Rxf2+ Offering a rook. When I saw this sacrifice, I had already seen the next part, but no spoilers. **30.Bxf2 e3** Offering a queen, but not the best according to Stockfish: **30...Bxh3 31.d7 e3 32.d8=Q Bxg2+ 33.Nxg2 e2+ 34.Kg1 exd1=Q+ 35.Rxd1 Rxd8**. The part I did see is pretty cool, though. If white plays **31.Bxc6**, accepting the queen, black responds **31...Rxf2+ 32.Kg1 Ne2+ 33.Kh1 Rh2#**. **31.Nd3** Much better is **31.Rxd4 Rxf2+ 32.Kg1 Rxg2+ 33.Nxg2 cxd4** where black holds a much smaller edge (Stockfish). **31...Bxh3** Offering a bishop, but weirdly protecting the queen, since white's bishop is now

pinned. If white accepts with 32.Bxh3, black replies Qh1#. 32.Nf4 Bxg2+ 33.Nxg2 Rxf2+ 34.Ke1 If 34.Kg1 then 34...Qxg2#. 34...Nf3# 0-1

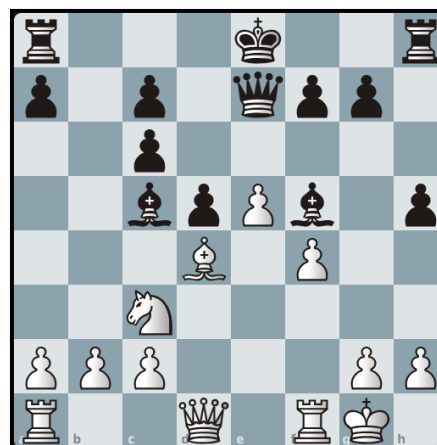


As a present for this victory, I was paired against our visitor from Tennessee.

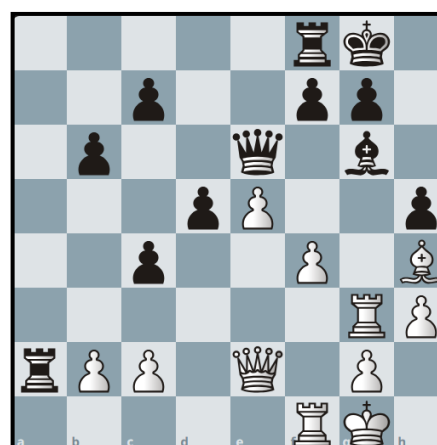
Tom Denton - FM Peter Bereolos
(2000) (2245)

Alabama Senior Ch. 2026, Round 3
Montevallo, AL; 4-18-2026

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Bc4 Nf6
5.e5 d5 6.Bb5 Ne4 7.Nxd4 Bc5 8.Be3
Bd7 9.Bxc6 bxc6 10.O-O Qe7 11.f3
Slightly better is 11.f4 Rb8 12.Nc3 Rxb2
13.Nxe4 dxe4 (Stockfish). 11...Nd6
12.f4 (12.Bf2 is an improvement –
Stockfish.) 12...Nf5 13.Bf2 Nxd4
14.Bxd4 Bf5 15.Nc3 h5 (15...Rb8 is a bit
better – Stockfish.)

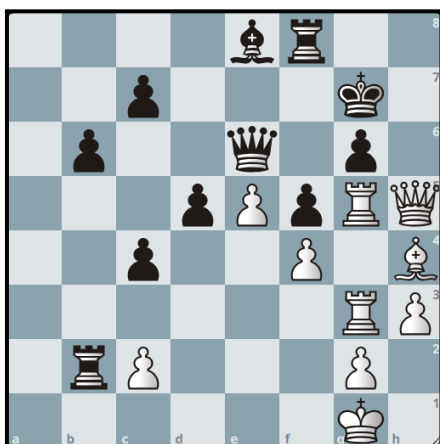


16.Na4 Bb6 17.Qd2 c5 18.Bf2 Rd8
19.Rad1 O-O 20.h3 c4 21.Nxb6 axb6
22.Qe2 Qe6 23.Bh4 Ra8 The struggle
has reached a point where white,
slightly inferior, has to decide what to
do. I chose aggression over passive
defense. The ending looked terrible for
white. Also, I knew that with opposite-
colored bishops combined with heavy
pieces still numerous, you are
supposed to attack. The other bishop
cannot assist on squares your own
bishop attacks. 24.Rf3 Offering the
pawn. 24...Rxa2 25.Rg3 Bg6 26.Rf1



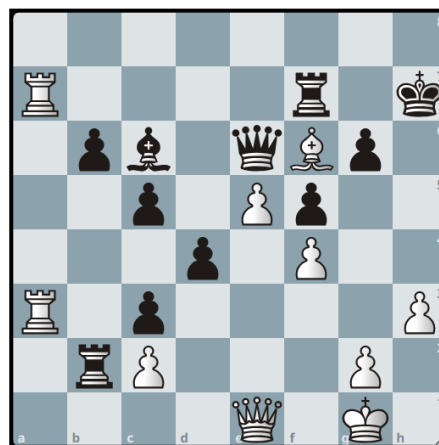
26...f5 Black's move surprised me. The

FM is not ready to succumb to my attack. **27.Rg5** Offering another pawn. **27...Rxb2** Black continues not to believe in white's attacking chances. **28.Rf3 Be8** (28...Rb1+ is better, says Stockfish.) **29.Rfg3 g6 30.Qxh5** I made this move quickly, thinking black didn't have much in the way of defense. **30.Rxh5 Rb1+ 31.Kh2 b5 32.Rgg5 Kg7 33.g4 fxe4 34.Rxe4 Bd7 35.Qg2 Be8 36.Bg5 Qc6 37.Bh6+ Kf7** would have been an improvement (Stockfish). **30...Kg7** Shockingly guarding everything. Now I see my pieces are tied up in knots.



31.Qd1 Trying to guard c2 and unwind my pieces a bit. **31.Ra3** was a better way to do it according to Stockfish. **31...c5 32.Ra3** (32.Qa1 Rxc2 33.Qa7+ Rf7 34.Rxe6+ Qxe6 35.Rxe6+ Kxe6 36.Qb8 Bc6 37.Bf6 was better – Stockfish.) **32...d4 33.Rgg3 Bc6** (33...Kh7 is more to the point – Stockfish.) **34.Ra7+ Rf7 35.Bf6+** (35.Qh5 Rxa7 36.Bf6+ Kf8 37.Rxe6 was much better – Stockfish.)

35...Kh7 36.Rga3 c3 (...Kg8 is much better, even though it looks very odd at first glance – Stockfish.) **37.Qe1** The dark squares are finally there for the taking. Black has no defense.



37...Kg8 38.Qh4 Rb7 This move was made with ONE SECOND on the clock. **39.Qh8+ Kf7 40.Qg7+ Ke8 41.Ra8+** Black resigned since mate is inevitable. **1-0 ■**



The Montevallo Chess Festival trophies, with the Senior Champion plaque in the center. (Photo by Antics Editor.)

Springtime Chess Results in Alabama

from uschess.org and various contributors

RAIDER RALLY CHESS TOURNAMENT

Huntsville, AL – February 21, 2026

TD: Todd Guthrie (Madison City Chess League)

K-12 winner: Blaine Lands, 5/5

K-8 winners: Lucas Osipychiev & Gopika Baipu,
4/5

K-5 winner: Axl Nichols, 4.5/5

K-3 winner: Rishika Baipu, 5/5

K-3 U300 winner: Milton Yarbrough, 5/5

2026 RIVER REGION GRADE CHAMPIONSHIP

Montgomery, AL – February 28, 2026

TD: Jonathan Rasberry (Rasberry Chess)

6th-12th grade winner: Kevin Chen, 4.5/5

4th-5th grade winners: Yejoon Shin & Ryan
Song, 4.5/5

2nd-3rd grade winner: Nithilan Kannan, 5/5

1st grade winner: Kavya Vyas, 4.5/5

2026 ALABASTER SCHOLASTIC

Alabaster, AL – March 14, 2026

TD: Caesar Lawrence (Caesar Chess)

Knight winner: Sri Malla, 4/5

AZALEA CITY OPEN 2026

Saraland, AL – March 21, 2026

TD: Gerald MacDonald (Mobile Chess Club)

Open winner: IM Stuart Rachels, 4/4

U1500 winner: Brian Barfield, 3.5/4

U1000 winner: Joseph Bond, 4/4

Scholastic (Rated) winner: Jackson Miller, 4/4

2026 BLACK WARRIOR CLASSIC

Tuscaloosa, AL – March 28, 2026

TD: Caesar Lawrence (Caesar Chess)

Premier winner: Landon Meadors, 4/4

Reserve winner: Patrick Bryant, 4/4



Top left: 2026 Black Warrior Classic Premier Section winner Landon Meadors.

Top right: Black Warrior Reserve Section winner Patrick Bryant.

Below: A scene from the Black Warrior Classic with battle underway.

(Photos submitted by TD Caesar Lawrence.)



2026 CONQUERING KINGS SCHOLASTIC

Montgomery, AL – April 18, 2026

TD: Jonathan Rasberry (Rasberry Chess Academy)

Open winner: Houston Champlin, 4.5/5

U500 winners: Aanvi Patel & Grant Swartzter, 4/5

2026 MONTEVALLO CHESS FESTIVAL

Montevallo, AL – April 18, 2026

TD: Caesar Lawrence (Caesar Chess)

AL Senior Ch. winner: Tom Denton, 4/4

Falcon Invitational winner: Scott Varagona, 3/4

Montevallo Classic winner: Brian Johnson, 4/4

Montevallo Scholastic winner: Alexander

Thrasher, 4.5/5

2026 MCCL GRADE CHAMPIONSHIPS

Madison, AL – April 18, 2026

TD: Todd Guthrie (Madison City Chess League)

9th-12th grade winner: Andrew Yang, 3.5/4

7th-8th grade winner: Esteban Jerez, 4/4

6th grade winner: Jonathan Lam, 4/4

5th grade winner: Milan Malak, 4/4

4th grade winner: Samuel Liao, 4/4

3rd grade winner: Lev Loginov, 4/4

2nd grade winner: Theodore Malak, 4/4

K-1st grade winner: Bode Atkins, 4/4

2026 SUMMER SCHOLASTIC

Alabaster, AL – May 2, 2026

TD: Caesar Lawrence (Caesar Chess)

Knight winner: Alexander Thrasher, 5/5

2026 VULCAN

Birmingham, AL – May 23, 2026

TD: Caesar Lawrence (Caesar Chess)

Premier winners: GM Alex Fishbein & NM Mitch Fishbein, 3/4

Reserve winners: Tucker McDaniel, Noah Smith & Krishna Patil, 3/4

Amateur winner: Wesley McCluney, 3.5/4

Knight (scholastic) winners: Aarav Patel &

Edward Hu, 4/5. ■



Above: The start of the final round of the 2026 Falcon Chess Invitational, Alabama's chess "super tournament." Left to right (seated): Daniel Gentry, Isaac Snow, Matthew Puckett, Christian Friedman, Xavier Bruni, Aaron DeCord, and Chibuzo Ilonze. TD Caesar Lawrence stands in the background. (Not pictured: Scott Varagona, since he was taking this photo!) The 2026 edition was particularly hard-fought, considering that Varagona's 3/4 score took clear first place. This low winning score was also seen at the first official (rated) Falcon Chess Invitational ten years ago, in 2016, when Jonathan Rasberry won with 3/4.

Below: A scene just before the first round of the 2026 Vulcan tournament at the Church at Brook Hills. Photo by *Antics* Editor.



IM Stuart Rachels at the World Senior Team Championship

by Scott Varagona

For the second year in a row, Stuart Rachels qualified to play as the 5th member of the U.S.A.'s age 50+ team at the World Senior Team Championship. The other members of the team were GMs Shabalov, Ehlvest, Kaidanov, and Novikov. The 2026 edition of this event took place in April, in Albania.

The Americans were the defending champions and, just like last year, they won in the end on tiebreaks. This makes IM Rachels a World Senior Team Champion once again. (Isn't it incredible to think that Stu had retired from chess for thirty years and then, very soon after coming back, he is suddenly a two-time world champion already?)

The final uschess.org report on the event may be found [here](#). To keep things Alabama-centric for the *Antics*, I will focus just on Stu's performance. Although Stu wished he had won a few positions that ended up drawn, overall I feel he can be pleased with his result. According to [lichess.org](#), Stu scored 5 points from 7 games, and without a single loss. (This improves on his 4/7 result from last year, by the way.)

Probably Stu's most notable game this time was his win with Black over a grandmaster in Round 3.

Although Stu's play wasn't perfect, he got the job done:

GM Rolando Kutirov - IM S. Rachels
Alkaloid Chess Club vs. USA
World Senior Team Ch.; 4-21-2026

1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.g3 c6 4.Bg2 Bf5 5.c4 e6 6.Nc3 h6 7.Qb3 Qb6 8.c5 Qxb3 9.axb3 Na6 10.Bf4 Nd7 11.h4 f6 12.h5 e5 13.Be3 Nb4 14.Ra4 Nc2+ 15.Kd2 exd4 16.Bxd4 Bxc5 17.Rc1 b5 18.Bxc5 bxa4 19.Nxa4 Nxc5 20.Nxc5 Nb4 21.Nd4 Bg4 22.f3 Bxh5 23.Nce6 Kd7 24.Bh3 Bf7 25.Nxg7+ Kc7 26.Ngf5 Kb6 27.Nd6 Rhf8 28.Rh1 c5 29.N4f5 h5 30.Bg2 Be6 31.Ng7 Bd7 32.Ndf5 Rh8 33.f4 Rh7 34.e4 Bxf5 35.Nxf5 dxe4 36.Bxe4 Re8 37.Nd6 Rd7 0-1

In the final round, the Americans took quick draws against a lower-rated Iceland team to secure overall victory. (Stu's game as Black was 1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.e3 e6 5.Bxc4 a6 1/2-1/2. Normally, I would tease him for this grandmaster draw, but since national pride was on the line, I'll allow it. ☺)

The U.S.A. 50+ team has built quite a dynasty at this event, and the Alabama chess community is proud to have Stu there as a part of it. ■

Bill Melvin: My Alabama Chess Rival

by Scott Varagona

The year 2026 marks the end of a long era. After living in Alabama for nearly forty years (and playing in Alabama tournaments for even longer than that), Bill Melvin recently retired from his job and is now moving out of state with his wife. Although he will surely continue to be active in chess, his participation in Alabama tournaments will be much rarer in the future. Bill, you will be missed! We wish you a happy retirement at your new home.

It is hard to overstate the huge impact Bill has made on chess in Alabama. I went into immense detail about Bill's accomplishments in *Kings of My Home State*, but let me hit just a few of the highlights:

- ◆ Bill has been one of the highest-rated players in the state for decades, and in quite a few years he was the state's only active 2200+ player.
- ◆ He attained the National Master, Original Life Master, and Norm-Based Life Master titles.
- ◆ He is an eight-time Alabama State Champion, and he has participated in the Alabama State Championship almost every year since 1988.



Bill Melvin (right) receives the 1998 Alabama State Championship trophy from TD Rich Bellezza. (Photo from November 1998-January 1999 *Antics*.)

- ◆ He has been an ACF President, a TD, a mentor for younger players, and a writer of over sixty articles for *Alabama Chess Antics*.
- ◆ He helped create the Alabama Chess Hall of Fame, and he was inducted as a member himself in 2022.

As a send-off and personal tribute to Bill, I wanted to talk about our chess rivalry and what it means to me. Our chess careers have been intertwined in various interesting ways over the last twenty-five years, and

many of my games with Bill have been memorable. Indeed, they were not just memorable—they were often heart-pounding, sometimes career-defining, and sometimes soul-crushing! Hopefully, this tribute will give us a sense of Bill's fierce fighting spirit at the board as well as his kind and generous nature as an Alabama chess colleague.

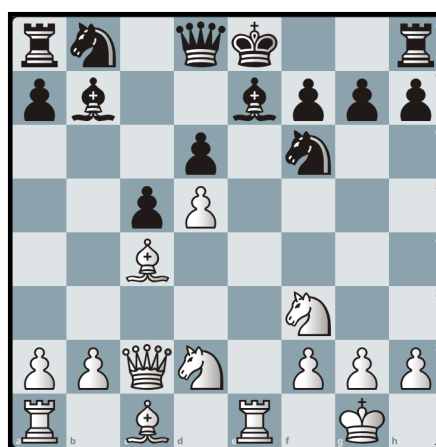
Our first game together was in Round 1 of the 2000 Alabama State Chess Championship in Birmingham. Bill had already been an NM for over ten years at this point. Although I was the Alabama High School Champion, fresh from a solid performance at the Denker Tournament of High School Champions, I was still just a 1909-rated small fry compared to Bill, who was a gigantic 2236.

S. Varagona – NM B. Melvin
(1909) (2236)

2000 AL State Championship, Round 1
Birmingham, AL; 9-2-2000

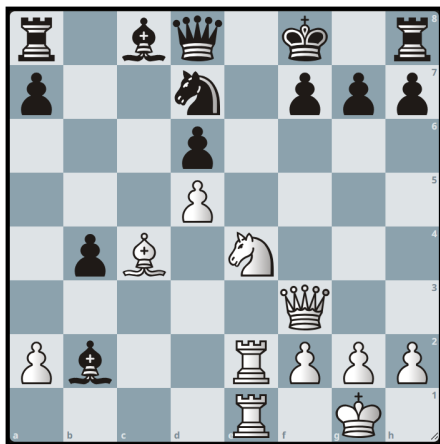
1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.Nf3 Bb7 5.Nbd2!? Bill Melvin loves playing the Benko Gambit just as much as I love declining it. This is a weird arrangement for White's pieces, though. In later games with Bill, I'd play 4.a4, waiting to see what Black does before committing my knights

anywhere. **5...Qa5 6.Qc2 bxc4 7.e4 e6 8.Bxc4 exd5 9.exd5 d6 10.O-O Be7** Bill is fond of these ambitious setups involving an early ...Bb7, ...Qa5, and ...e6. However, in my view, something has gone wrong for Black in the Benko if he ends up with a bishop on e7 instead of g7. **11.Re1 Qd8**



12.Qb3! Bc8 13.Qe3! Stopping Black from castling. Even all these years later, I'm still very proud of this queen maneuver. **13...Nbd7?** Bill was rightly critical of this move. He wished he had found Daniel Thomas' suggestion of **13...a6!** followed by ...Ra7, after which castling is still possible. **14.b4!** Sacrificing a pawn for development. It's rare for me to play so boldly. I must have been inspired to go all out! **14...cxb4 15.Bb2 Kf8 16.Re2 Ng4 17.Qf4 Nge5 18.Rae1 Bf6 19.Ne4 Nxf3+ 20.Qxf3 Bxb2??** Black's position was already terrible, but now White checkmates by force. Bill suggested

20...Ne5 as a better defense.



21.Nxd6! Nf6 Stockfish reminded me that there is also a beautiful checkmate after 21...Ne5 22.Qxf7+! Nxf7 23.Re8+. **22.Re8+ Qxe8 23.Rxe8+ Nxe8 24.Qxf7# 1-0**

Looking at the final mate, Bill said: "Hmm. Pretty." He shook my hand. It was my first win against a master. And it was also a win against the person who would become the eventual 2000 Alabama State Champion—Bill Melvin, at the peak of his game! For those reasons, this game has always been a precious memory to me. Still, there was a fly in the ointment: I found out later that I had botched the notation, so my game score was probably inaccurate and/or incomplete. That had always bothered me. But then, when I started the *Antics* Preservation Project in the late 2010s, Bill handed me a copy of the November 2000 *Antics*, which I had never seen

before. To my shock, in an article Bill wrote about his successful 2000 state championship, he had annotated our game—even though it was a game he'd lost! The complete and correct notation was there. After almost twenty years, the best game of my high school days—and one of my best games ever—was intact, and back in my hands again. Thank you so much, Bill. You have no idea how happy that made me.

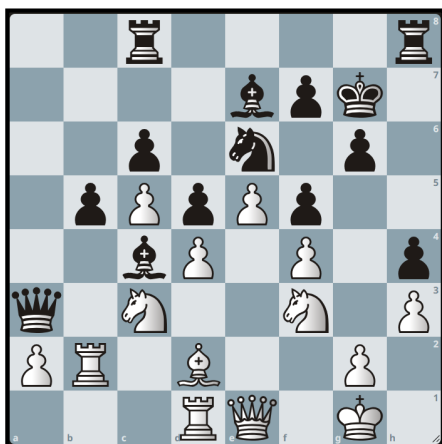
This was not the only time Bill annotated one of his losses against me. In our second encounter, at the Vulcan Open in 2002, I sprang my 3...Na6!?! line of the Caro-Kann Advance Variation upon Bill for the first time. I managed to win a nice positional game, and Bill was so impressed that he put the game in the Winter 2002 *Antics*. I defeated him with 3...Na6!?! again at a small tournament in 2003, and suddenly I found myself with a 3-0 score against him. "You must have his number," TD Kirk Petty told me. But Bill struck back and beat me for the first time in 2004 (with the help of a tricky Chigorin Defense), spoiling what was otherwise a pleasant Queen of Hearts for me. Bill annotated that game as well (see Spring 2004 *Antics*).

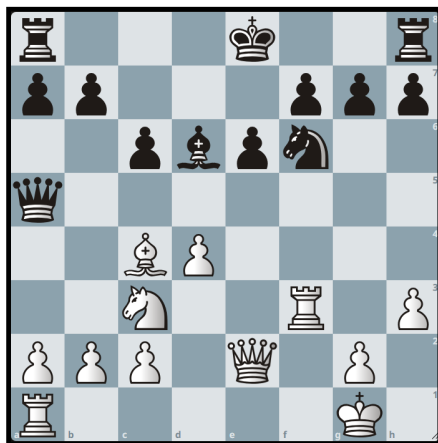
It was 2005 when I played what is probably my favorite game against Bill. With Black in Round 3 at the state championship, I once again tried my

3...Na6!? Caro Advance line. We got a closed position with tons of imbalances. The much-ridiculed "knight on the rim" had maneuvered from a6 to e6, and finally got its moment in the sun:

NM B. Melvin – S. Varagona
(2200) (2075)

2005 AL State Championship, Round 3
Montgomery, AL; 9-3-2005





13.Bxe6! Ouch! A cold shower. I didn't even want to *think* about playing the ghastly 13...fxe6 14.Qxe6+ Be7 15.Re1 Qc7 16.Rfe3 Ng8. Instead, I castled and life went on. Objectively, Black isn't lost; still, missing that shot threw me so off balance that, psychologically, I was doomed. Bill would grind me down in what "should" have been an equal endgame: **1-0**. When Bill smelled blood in the water, there was no stopping him...

As you can see: win, lose, or draw, our games were almost always interesting. There I was, with my space-gaining queen pawn openings as White and solid Caro-Kann as Black, and he would come at me with his aggressive 1.e4 lines and wild Benko Gambits. Our styles were such fierce opposites that it was very rare for our games to end in a draw. Plus, Bill was usually trying to win at all costs. At some point, I realized that there was no point in

offering Bill a draw, because almost always—after a pause—Bill would make a move and softly say, "Let's play it out." We've only had one blatant grandmaster draw, a seven-mover in the last round of the 2006 Queen of Hearts. That draw gave us both a tie for first place: I won my first ever Queen of Hearts, and Bill got his first Queen of Hearts win since 1994. We both must have felt so desperate to get that QoH title that we temporarily set our bloodlust aside. But this was the exception. Usually, "No MERCY" was the unspoken rule for us.

I defeated Bill once more at the 2007 Alabama State Championship. Then—having traded blows from 2002 to 2007—Bill and I didn't play a classical game again until the state championship of 2015. On that occasion, I outplayed him as White in a Benko Gambit Declined (using my offbeat 4.a4 line) and went on to win the state title. Once again, the legend seemed to be true: "If you want to be state champion, first you have to get through Bill Melvin."

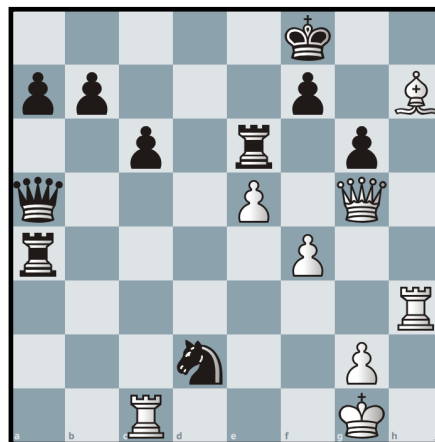
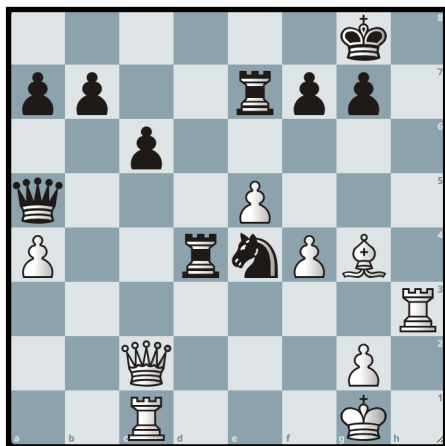
Then came the 2016 Alabama State Championship in Huntsville, which I'll remember forever... I entered the championship with a feeling of confidence. I was the top seed, I'd been having a fantastic chess year, and everything about my game seemed to

be in order. However, my play was shaky in the first few rounds of the championship, and I fell behind the leaders. It all came down to my final round game with—you guessed it—my implacable rival, Bill Melvin. Yet this time, unlike most of our previous encounters, there was a twist. Bill only needed a draw to secure the state title, whereas I desperately needed a win. So, while he was playing solidly, I was going for a do-or-die attack. It was a reversal of roles that I wasn't accustomed to. Although I *almost* succeeded, in retrospect I think I played it all wrong. A "slow burn" strategy (like Kasparov used in the must-win last game of the 1987 World Championship) would have been wiser, and more in line with my own chess personality at the time.

NM S. Varagona – NM B. Melvin
(2274) (2200)

2016 AL State Championship, Round 6
Huntsville, AL; 9-4-2016

White's position does look promising, but I burned a lot of time on my way here. **31.Bf5** Black is in a tight spot. Thanks to the trick **31...Qxa4 32.Bh7+!** Kf8 **33.Bxe4**, threatening mate on h8, the knight on e4 cannot be protected. It has no safe retreat, either. So: **31...Nd2??** This natural move was what I expected during the game, but the computer found the dazzling (and inhuman) **31...Ng3!** after which somehow the game is almost even. The point is that the dangerous rook on h3 will get drawn away from the h-file if White takes the knight, and Black can take the f4 pawn as compensation. The pawn on e5 may soon fall as well. **32.Bh7+??** Blowing a great chance. It wasn't on my radar at all, but Stockfish's **32.Qd1!!** would have won. The immediate threat is **Rh8+!** followed by mate, and if Black tries, e.g., **32...g6 33.Qg4 Qd8 34.Qh4**, White's mate threats are so strong that Black has to play **34...Nf3+**, giving up a piece. **32... Kf8 33.Qf5 Re6 34.Qg4 g6 35.Qg5 Rxa4**



Bill cold-bloodedly ignores what I'm doing and grabs another pawn, intending to trade rooks on a1. In crushing time pressure, I frantically looked for something, *anything* to keep the game alive. **36.f5??** Wrong! I panicked, and now I'm truly lost. The computer says **36.Bg8** or **36.Qh6+** would keep the balance, but "keeping the balance" isn't good enough for my tournament situation. It was only while tossing and turning in bed that night that I realized I should have tried **36.Bxg6!?**. The idea is that, obviously, **36...fxg6?? 37.Rh8+** followed by **Qh6** is a decisive invasion. Thus, Black would be tempted to play **36...Rxc6??** instead, which also fails: after **37.Rh8+ Kg7 38.Qh5**, White's mating threats are so dire that Black must try **38...Rxc2+**, but after **39.Kh1!** Black's checks soon run out and White wins.

Nevertheless: rather than the faulty **36...Rxc6??** (or **36...fxg6??**), the move **36...Nf3+!** would still win for Black, according to the computer. Maybe Bill would have found **...Nf3+**, or maybe he wouldn't, but either way: this line with **36.Bxg6!?** was my best practical chance. If only I had thought of all this during the game. **36...Ra1!** My goose is cooked. That master of attack, Bill Melvin, kept his nerve and proved he's a master of defense as well. **37.Qh6+ Ke8 38.Rxa1 Qxa1+ 39.Kf2 Qd4+ 40.Re3 gxf5 41.Qg7 f4 0-1**



Bill Melvin with his hard-earned 2016 Alabama State Championship plaque. (Photo from Fall 2016 [Antics](#).)

I can now say with certainty: losing that game is the biggest regret of my entire chess career. Bill got his revenge on me at the worst (best?) possible moment! And to make matters worse: just when I'd almost caught up to Bill's record number of Alabama State Champion titles—he had seven, and I had six—now he pulled even further into the lead, with EIGHT. *Argh!* My despair was equaled only by Bill's happiness: it was his first state title since 2001. (Bill once told me that this 2016 title and his very first title in 1990 were the ones that stood out in his mind the most. "The rest of them blur together," he said. I could see that: after all, there were quite a few of them...)

For Bill, winning the state title after a long drought seemed to supercharge his chess career again. He

had further good results over the next few years—including victories at the strong Falcon Chess Invitational and the Huntsville City Championship in 2018, not to mention his acquisition of the Norm-Based Life Master title.

Meanwhile, I kept on fighting too, and then—a few successful state championships later—I finally overtook Bill’s championship record in 2019. He had set the bar so high with eight titles that I thought I would *never* catch up to him, but now (somehow) I have eleven. I might not have reached that number if Bill’s record hadn’t inspired me to train harder and reach for the stars.

As fate decided, Bill and I did not meet OTB at any Alabama State Championships after 2016, but we continued to clash in other tournaments, such as the Magic City Classic, the Castle Chess Grand Prix, the Birmingham Classic, the Vulcan, and the Falcon Chess Invitational. Our last battle to date was at the 2025 Falcon Chess Invitational: quite fittingly, we played an absolute barnburner of a game, yet another in the 3...Na6!? Caro Advance. If that is the last game we ever play—as Alabama chess rivals, at least—then it’s a heck of a way to finish off our rivalry. (See the Spring 2025 *Antics* for my annotations.) In total, the two of us have now played 18 classical rated



My favorite photo of Bill. Somehow, this image seems to capture his personality—both on and off the board—perfectly. (Photo from Summer 2018 [Antics](#).)

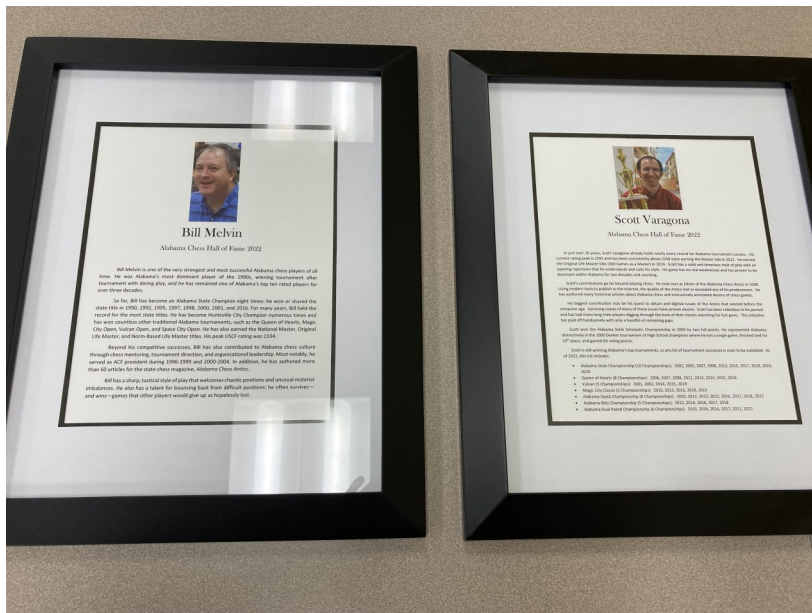
games together. What a wild ride it has been!

As I said in [Kings of My Home State](#), “To improve as a chess player, one must play against stronger players. Thanks to Bill’s frequent participation in Alabama chess tournaments in the 2000s, I regularly got the chance to do battle with a chess master—and a legendary multi-time state champion—right in my own backyard.” So, thank you for being there, Bill. For aspiring younger players like me, you made Alabama chess competitions worthwhile. Now, since I’m one of the few active 2200+ players in Alabama myself, I hope to “pay it forward” by continuing to be active in state-level tournaments, just as you always did.

I may be biased, but when we consider the biggest rivalries in Alabama State Championship history—like Therrell vs. Rachels vs. Denton in the '80s, or Melvin vs. Therrell vs. Meidinger in the early '90s—surely Varagona vs. Melvin in the 2000s & 2010s must be high on the list as well. Therefore, I will conclude by providing the notation for all my Alabama State Championship games against Bill, which span from the year 2000 to 2016. To underscore the historical

importance of these encounters: after five of these six games, one of the two of us went on to become the sole state champion that year. All six games were decisive.

At the end of the day, great rivalries make for great chess, and competing with Bill Melvin was a lot of fun. I hope everyone enjoyed this story, and I hope the *Antics* will see similar articles about other notable Alabama chess rivalries in the future.



Top right: Bill Melvin and Scott Varagona at the 2022 Birmingham Classic, where they tied for first. (Photo by Caesar Lawrence.)

Bottom right and top left: after helping to create the Alabama Chess Hall of Fame in 2021, Bill Melvin and Scott Varagona had the honor of writing each other's Hall of Fame biographies, and inducting each other into the Alabama Chess Hall of Fame, in 2022. (Photos from Fall 2022 *Antics*.)

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 [Date "2000.09.02"]
 [Round "1"]
 [White "Varagona, Scott"]
 [Black "Melvin, Bill"]
 [Result "1-0"]
 [ECO "A57"]
 [WhiteElo "1909"]
 [BlackElo "2236"]
 [PlyCount "47"]

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 b5 4. Nf3 Bb7 5. Nbd2 Qa5 6. Qc2 bxc4
 7. e4 e6 8. Bxc4 exd5 9. exd5 d6 10. O-O Be7 11. Re1 Qd8 12.
 Qb3 Bc8 13. Qe3 Nbd7 14. b4 cxb4 15. Bb2 Kf8 16. Re2 Ng4
 17. Qf4 Nge5 18. Rael Bf6 19. Ne4 Nxf3+ 20. Qxf3 Bxb2 21.
 Nxd6 Nf6 22. Re8+ Qxe8 23. Rxe8+ Nxe8 24. Qxf7# 1-0

[Event "Alabama State Ch 2005"]
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 [Black "Varagona, Scott"]
 [Result "0-1"]
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 [WhiteElo "2200"]
 [BlackElo "2075"]
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1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 Na6 4. Nc3 Nc7 5. f4 g6 6. Be3 h5 7. h3
 Nh6 8. Nf3 Nf5 9. Bf2 h4 10. Bd3 e6 11. Ne2 Be7 12. Qd2 Kf8
 13. Bxf5 exf5 14. O-O Ne6 15. b3 b6 16. c4 Ba6 17. Rfcl Qd7
 18. Rc2 Kg7 19. Rd1 Rac8 20. Qel Qd8 21. Be3 Bb7 22. c5 Ba6
 23. b4 Bc4 24. Nc3 b5 25. Rcd2 a5 26. bxa5 Qxa5 27. Rb2 Qa3
 28. Bcl Qa5 29. Bd2 Qa3 30. Rdb1 Bd3 31. Rb3 Qa7 32. R1b2
 Bc4 33. Rb4 Nxd4 34. Nxd4 Bxc5 35. Ne2 Bxd4+ 36. Nxd4
 Qxd4+ 37. Kh1 c5 38. Rxb5 Bxb5 39. Rxb5 Qe4 40. Qcl c4 41.
 Qb2 d4 42. Rb7 c3 43. Qb6 Qxb7 44. Qxb7 cxd2 45. e6 d1=Q+
 46. Kh2 Rhf8 47. e7 Rfe8 0-1

[Event "Alabama State Ch 2006"]
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 [Date "2006.09.02"]
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 [BlackElo "2118"]
 [PlyCount "91"]

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 dxe4 4. f3 exf3 5. Nxf3 Bg4 6. Bc4 e6 7.
 O-O Nf6 8. h3 Bxf3 9. Rxf3 Bd6 10. Bg5 Nbd7 11. Qe2 Qa5 12.
 Bxf6 Nxf6 13. Bxe6 O-O 14. Bb3 Rae8 15. Qd3 Bb8 16. Raf1
 Qc7 17. g3 Qd7 18. Kg2 Qd6 19. Nd1 Re4 20. c3 Rfe8 21. Ne3
 Qe7 22. Nf5 Re2+ 23. Kgl Qe4 24. Qxe4 R8xe4 25. Nng7 Rxb2
 26. Bc4 Kxg7 27. Rxf6 Re7 28. Rxf7+ Rxf7 29. Rxf7+ Kg6 30. Rf2
 Rb1+ 31. Kg2 Rcl 32. Bd3+ Kg7 33. Bc2 b5 34. h4 Bc7 35. Bb3
 Ba5 36. Rf7+ Kg6 37. Rxa7 Bxc3 38. Rd7 Bb4 39. g4 h6 40. Be6
 Rc2+ 41. Kf3 Kf6 42. Bb3 Rh2 43. Rc7 Rh3+ 44. Kg2 Rxh4 45.
 Rxc6+ Kg5 46. Bd1 {Black eventually resigned.} 1-0

[Event "Alabama State Ch 2007"]
 [Site "Montgomery, AL"]
 [Date "2007.09.01"]
 [Round "4"]
 [White "Melvin, Bill"]
 [Black "Varagona, Scott"]
 [Result "0-1"]
 [ECO "A06"]
 [WhiteElo "2208"]
 [BlackElo "2098"]
 [PlyCount "70"]

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. b3 d5 3. Bb2 c5 4. e3 Nc6 5. c4 d4 6. exd4 cxd4
 7. g3 e5 8. d3 Bf5 9. Nh4 Bg4 10. Be2 Bh3 11. Bfl Qd7 12. Bxh3
 Qxh3 13. Qf3 Bb4+ 14. Nd2 O-O 15. O-O-O a5 16. a4 Qd7
 17. Qf5 Qd6 18. Ne4 Nxe4 19. Qxe4 Bc3 20. Qe2 f5 21. Nf3
 Ra6 22. Kb1 Rb6 23. Qc2 Nb4 24. Qcl Nxd3 25. Rxd3 Rxb3
 26. Rd2 Bxb2 27. Rxb2 Rxf3 28. Qd2 Rc3 29. Rd1 Qc6 30. Qe2
 Re8 31. Rb5 Rxc4 32. Qa2 Kh8 33. Qd2 h6 34. Qxa5 Qe4+ 35.
 Kb2 Qc2+ 0-1

[Event "Alabama State Ch 2015"]
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 [Black "Melvin, Bill"]
 [Result "1-0"]
 [ECO "A57"]
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 [BlackElo "2200"]
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1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 b5 4. a4 bxc4 5. Nc3 Bb7 6. e4 Qa5 7.
 Bd2 e6 8. e5 exd5 9. exf6 Qb6 10. Qe2+ Kd8 11. Nf3 gxf6 12.
 O-O-O d4 13. Qxc4 dxc3 14. Bxc3 d5 15. Rxd5+ Bxd5 16.
 Qxd5+ Kc7 17. Qxf7+ Nd7 18. Bb5 Rd8 19. Rd1 Bd6 20. Bxf6
 a6 21. Bxd8+ Rxd8 22. Bxd7 Rxd7 23. Qc4 Rg7 24. g3 Qc6 25.
 Nh4 Be5 26. Nf5 Rg5 27. Ne3 Bd4 28. Qf7+ Kd8 29. Nc4 Qxa4
 30. Qf6+ Kc7 31. Qe7+ Kb8 32. Qd8+ Kb7 33. Nd6+ 1-0

[Event "Alabama State Ch 2016"]
 [Site "Huntsville, AL"]
 [Date "2016.09.04"]
 [Round "6"]
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 [Black "Melvin, Bill"]
 [Result "0-1"]
 [ECO "D36"]
 [WhiteElo "2274"]
 [BlackElo "2200"]
 [PlyCount "82"]

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. cxd5 exd5 5. Bg5 Be7 6. e3 O-O
 7. Bd3 h6 8. Bh4 c6 9. Qc2 Nh5 10. Bg3 Nng3 11. hxg3 Bg4 12.
 Nf3 Nd7 13. Nh4 Nf6 14. Nf5 Bb4 15. Rh4 Bxf5 16. Bxf5 Re8
 17. Kfl Bxc3 18. bxc3 Qd6 19. c4 dxc4 20. Qxc4 Qd5 21. Qc2
 Rad8 22. Rcl Re7 23. a4 Qa5 24. Kgl Rd5 25. g4 Qd8 26. Rh3
 Qa5 27. f4 h5 28. e4 Rxd4 29. e5 hxg4 30. Bxg4 Ne4 31. Bf5
 Nd2 32. Bh7+ Kf8 33. Qf5 Re6 34. Qg4 g6 35. Qg5 Rxa4 36. f5
 Ra1 37. Qh6+ Ke8 38. Rxa1 Qxa1+ 39. Kf2 Qd4+ 40. Re3 gxf5
 41. Qg7 f4 0-1 ■

Tying Up Some Loose Ends

by Charles Anthony

Just when I thought I was finished “Connecting the Dots” (Spring ’24 *Antics*) I realized that I still had some loose ends to tie up. What started out in my mind as a short treatise on the Stonewall Attack has morphed into more of a tribute to my oldest chess buddy who, at 89 years of age, recently came over from Georgia and beat me with Black against the venerable Stonewall Attack. More on that game later.

The Stonewall has been on display lately in the *Antics*, with Life Master Scott Varagona employing it skillfully in a win over International Master Stuart Rachels at the ’24 Magic City Classic (Winter ’25 *Antics*). One of my own Stonewall Attacks was featured in “The Rest of the Story,” a win against Paul White in the ’82 Queen of Hearts (Winter ’16 *Antics*). Another of my wins with the Stonewall was in the final match of the ’87 Fayette Chess Club Championship against Phillip Taylor (Summer ’20 *Antics*). But the Stonewall has also led to some devastating defeats, the best example being the 14-move miniature against Justin Beard in “Is It Ever OK to Play h2-h3?” (Summer ’23 *Antics*). Another would be the game featured in this article.

My association with Phillip goes



Charles Anthony (left) and Phillip Taylor at the Fayette Chess Club in 2016. (Photo from Winter 2023 *Antics*.)

back to the Spring of 1980. We had made the decision to found a local chess club. Phillip showed up for the first meeting and has been playing ever since. His chess history has been well documented in his article “Chess, An Important Facet of My Life” (Summer ’24 *Antics*). This article has also been published in the state chess magazines of Georgia and Tennessee. We both joined the USCF at the same time, our membership numbers differing by only a single digit. We both played our first rated tournament at the 1981 Magnolia Marathon, on the campus of Mississippi State University. We have both served as the president of the Fayette Chess Club, and he is also a former Vice President of the Alabama

Chess Federation. He also guaranteed the prize fund of many of our local tournaments, including the 1986 State Championship, held at the historic Fayette Civic Center. The Georgia State Championship now carries his name in the title because of his philanthropy to his new state organization. At our latest meeting he told me that he still studies chess tactics daily and maintains a very active chess tournament schedule, averaging one tournament per month. That is a most inspiring fact. Much love and respect, sir!

When I read that the Black Warrior Classic was returning to nearby Tuscaloosa, I put out a call on social media for possible chess “sparring partners.” My old chess buddy Phillip was the only person to respond. He was coming home from Georgia to take care of some business, so we scheduled some time for chess. Upon his arrival we chose colors by lot and my lot fell on White. Since I had not really prepared any opening traps, like I had done for one of my most widely circulated games, “My Immortal Game” (*Chess Life*, July 2016 and Spring '16 *Antics*), I decided to give the Stonewall one more try.

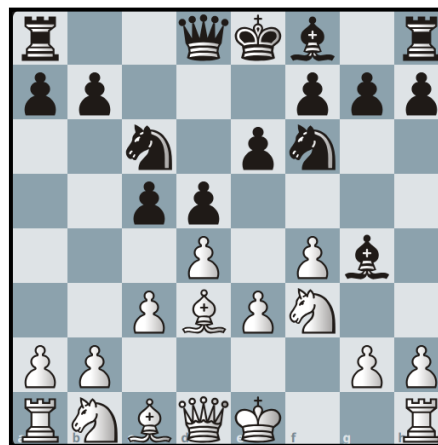
STONEWALL ATTACK

Charles Anthony – Phillip O. Taylor
(1790) (1505)

Fayette, AL; 3-19-2026

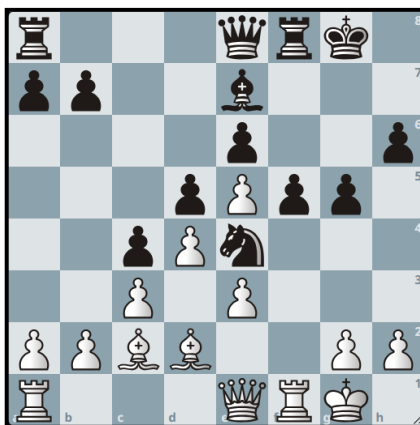
These are our published ratings, but are in no way indicative of our relative playing strengths today. Most of my rating points are leftovers from the 1980s. In the five tournaments I’ve played since I retired, from 2015 to 2019, I’ve gone from my last-century rating of 1880 down to 1790. In our prime, Phillip and I topped out at 1914 and 1917, respectively. My rating floor is now 1600, but I’m not sure that my playing strength today is even that much. But I still enjoy the game.

1.d4 d5 2.e3 Nf6 3.Bd3 c5 4.c3 Allowing the bishop to remain on the same diagonal if Black plays c4. **4...Nc6 5.f4 Bg4** White has accomplished the Stonewall pawn position, but Stockfish gives Black an almost full pawn advantage at this point. **6.Nf3 e6**

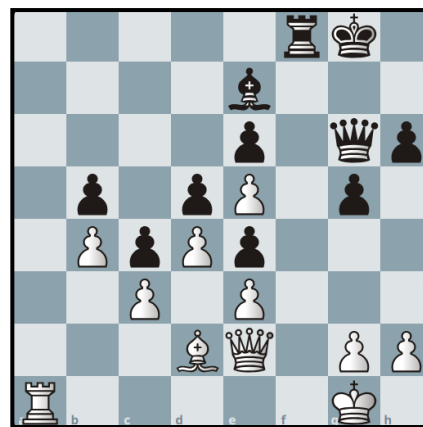


7.Nbd2 An objective for White is to establish a knight outpost on e5. This move prevents Black from planting a

knight on e4, in a reversed Stonewall setup. 7...c4! 8.Bc2 Be7 9.O-O O-O All even again. 10.Qe1 White misses his chance to eliminate his backward pawn with 10.e4. 10...Bxf3 11.Nxf3² Ne4 12.Nd2 f5 I was hoping to entice him into creating a backward pawn of his own. His e-pawn now became my long-term target. 13.Nf3 h6 Stockfish favors a queenside expansion for Black with b5 and a5, but this h-pawn would ultimately become "the little pawn that could." 14.Ne5 White achieves one the major thematic objectives of the Stonewall, but cannot maintain the e5 outpost. 14...Nxe5 15.fxe5 Qe8 16.Bd2 g5 Black doesn't want to give up his "good" knight for my "bad" bishop.



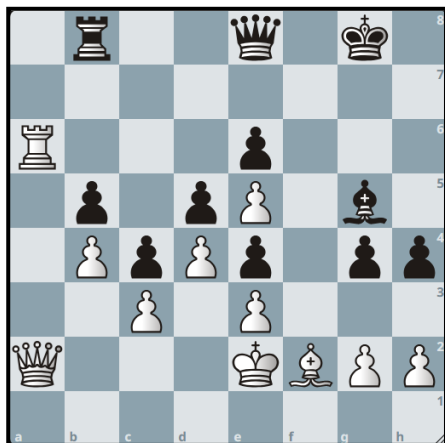
17.Bxe4 fxe4 The knight at e4 must go, but Black's bishop is still better. 18.Qe2 Qg6 19.b4 Remembering the success that I had against Paul White in '82 with this queenside expansion strategy, I decided to try it again. Up to this point I have lacked a coherent game plan. 19...b5 20.a4 Rxf1+ 21.Kxf1 Rf8+ 22.Kg1 a6 Stockfish has the game evaluated all even. 23.axb5 axb5



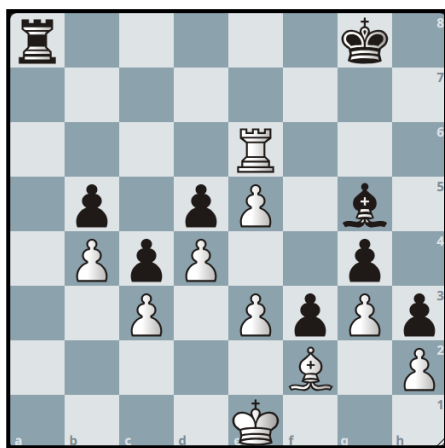
24.Ra6 The computer likes Ra7 or Ra5 better. My idea was to attack the backward e-pawn with my rook and queen. My plan is immediately thwarted, for the moment. 24...g4 25.Be1 Rb8 26.Ra7 Bg5 27.Bf2 h5 Still all even. 28.Ra6 Rf8 29.Ra5 Rb8 30.Ra6

1. In my view, Black shouldn't release the c5-d4 tension yet unless there's a good reason to do so. Instead, 7...Qc7! puts White in a slightly awkward spot. Black threatens to take on d4, and if White recaptures with the e-pawn (which is usually preferred), then the f-pawn would hang. That might induce White to play g2-g3 to protect the f-pawn, but that has its own problems: White's light squares start to look like Swiss cheese. For all these reasons, in this exact configuration of pieces, I would rather not play 7.Nbd2 but instead simply castle. That way, the bishop on c1 can still protect the f-pawn in the event of ...Qc7 and an early ...cxd4 and exd4. Of course, this means Black may plant a knight on e4 at some point; that is unfortunate, but not necessarily the end of the world. There is still a whole big maneuvering game ahead. -Editor
2. I recommend 11.Rxf3! so that e3-e4 can still be played. Although bringing a knight to e5 is usually desirable, in this case, keeping Black's knight out of e4, and opening up the position for White's two bishops with e3-e4, is far more important. -Editor

Qe8 31.Kf1 Ra8 32.Qa2 Rb8 33.Ke2 h4

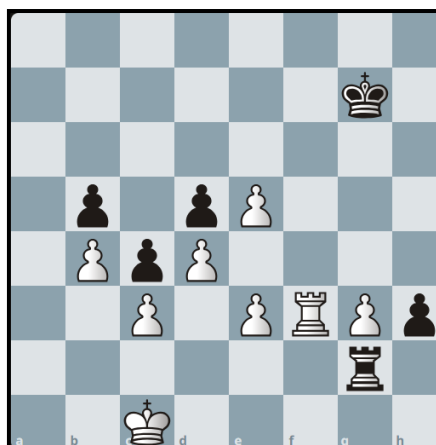


34.g3 From all even to a full piece down after this move. Black also misses an immediate ...Qf7. 34...h3 35.Ke1 Qf7 36.Qe2 Qf3 Stockfish likes this move for Black, with a full pawn advantage. 37.Qxf3 exf3 38.Rxe6 The pawn was too tempting. Stockfish says that Black is essentially a full piece ahead at this point. Allowing the Black rook access to the a-file was a HUGE mistake. 38...Ra8



39.Rg6+ Kf7 40.Rxg5 Ra1+ 41.Kd2 Ra2+

42.Kc1 Of the three possible moves, I chose the worst one. If I had made either other move and offered a draw, I believe that he would have taken it, based on post-game discussion. But he was clearly winning, even before my final blunder. 42...Rxf2 43.Rxg4 Rxh2 44.Rf4+ Kg7 45.Rxf3 Rg2 0-1



There was no way to stop the pawn. I sure could have used a tempo or two that I had carelessly thrown away earlier. Congratulations on a solid game, my old friend. It felt like old times. (P.S.: Since originally submitting this article I have ordered a couple of Stonewall books by IM Andrew Soltis. Since they are out of print they are a little pricey, but I need some help.) ■

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July 11	4th Annual AL State Chess 960 Ch.	Mobile, AL
July 11	2026 Birmingham Classic & Scholastic	Birmingham, AL
July 18	Alabama Dual-Rated State Ch.	Montgomery, AL
August 8	2026 Clarence Kalenian	Dothan, AL

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Games in .pgn format are strongly preferred.

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