

## CHESS & VEGAS-A COMBINATION MADE IN HEAVEN!

Las Vegas is one of my favorite cities in the world. I am a professed chess junkie. An opportunity to combine these two elements into one event was too good to pass up so I ponied up the \$1000 entry fee and entered the inaugural Millionaire Chess Open in early October taking place at the Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino in fabulous Las Vegas. The venue was perfectly located on the heart of the Las Vegas Strip within walking distance of many major casinos and top restaurants.

This event was the brainchild of GM Maurice Ashley and entrepreneur Amy Lee. With a \$1 million total prize fund, the intent was to create a glitzy event of large enough magnitude in order to further increase the visibility of chess around the world. Certainly an event not on par with the Super Bowl or World Series but the goal was to hopefully obtain increased media coverage and eventually generate more interest in this centuries-old sport. Maurice Ashley, the first African-American GM, is a gifted promoter while Amy Lee, a Canadian citizen born in Vietnam, is a very successful investor/entrepreneur. Together they made GM Ashley's dream a reality. They expected to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars on the event, but that was the sacrifice they were willing to endure in order to further promote the future of big-money open tournaments. Several top-level GMs were in attendance headed by World Number 7 (and eventual winner) Wesley So who defeated his good friend and roommate, Ray Robson to take home the \$100,000 top prize on Millionaire Monday.

Another MCC member, David Bird, was also participating and we ended up hanging out together between rounds and meeting up for meals during the course of the tournament.

At registration the night before the tournament, we were given a funky souvenir chess bag, some discount coupons and an opportunity to get a free 10 minute massage. It was fun chatting with the people in line to get their opinions on the upcoming tournament.

There was a buffet breakfast for the players before the first round. Afterwards, Maurice and Amy gave their welcome speeches. For entertainment, they had a stand-up comic perform. His jokes were so bad, that David and I snuck off to the tournament hall and took the pictures that are posted on the MCC website.

Security for the tournament was comparable to that of taking a flight out of Logan. Even going to the bathroom required the players to go through the screening booth. No cell phones were allowed in the playing hall. With so much money at stake, the organizers wanted to make sure there was no possibility of cheating taking place.

The main ballroom was transformed into a grand tournament hall replete with splendid decor as you can see from the photos. All sets, boards, clocks and official score sheets were provided. After the 1st round, pairings were available online an hour before the upcoming round. I played in the Under 2000 section. Performance-wise, I did not do so well, scoring 2 wins and 5 losses. 3 of my losses were actually hard-fought battles where I held the advantage in the middle game but could not secure the point due to time pressure or a late game inaccuracy. In one of my losses, I had a 3 position repetition draw but failed to call over the arbiter BEFORE making the move which would have resulted in the 3rd repetition. Instead, I made the move first and THEN claimed the draw which is incorrect. Lesson learned and an important rule to remember for all MCC players!

It was fun playing people I never saw before with the exception being the 6th round, where I played a guy from Massachusetts whom I had played at Foxwoods earlier this year.

There was a room where you could watch some of the games on the top boards with commentary by various GMs. Also, a huge skittles room was provided complete with sets and boards. There was no bookseller at the tournament.

Outside of my performance, I had a great time. I even won \$100 at the craps table. As I mentioned in the opening paragraph, I love Las Vegas and have been there dozens of times. I never get tired of seeing the sights and eating at some of the best restaurants in the world. It is truly the City That Never Sleeps. The fact that I was able to play chess there just added to my overall enjoyment. Hanging out with David was fun as we went over our games and sampled some really nice restaurants together. Two outstanding eateries were Gordon Ramsey's BurGR in Planet Hollywood and Jose Andres' Jaleo in the Cosmopolitan Hotel. We even found this hidden pizza parlor in the Cosmopolitan which featured a unique (and delicious) "White Pizza". By the way, congratulations to David for finishing in-the-money for the tournament!

Maurice has already confirmed that there will be a 2015 Millionaire Chess tournament. The venue is not decided, but I personally hope it will be held in Las Vegas again. Accommodations are very reasonable and there is so much to see and do when you're not playing. Obviously, Maurice and Amy pulled out all stops to create a monumental event. Hopefully most of the kinks experienced in this inaugural event will be worked out and things will run more smoothly next year. Also, I hope they will not be discouraged by the huge amount of money they will continue to lose over the next several years hosting this tournament unless they can attract more deep-pocketed sponsors. Let's see a larger MCC contingent for Millionaire Chess 2 next year!