

THE FRAMINGHAM CHESS CLUB

A USCF AND MACA AFFILIATE

June 1, 1985

THE FIRST TWO YEARS--A BRIEF HISTORY

The Birth and Growth of the Club

The Framingham Chess Club was conceived in January 1983 by a Framingham player, Mark Bond, and his partner at work, Warren Pinches of Boston. The Framingham area had supported a flourishing club during the "Fischer Boom" years 1972-74, during which time there had even been chess stores in Ashland and Sudbury, but by 1983 all that remained was a small, declining club at the Sudbury American Legion and an even smaller club at a private home in Natick. Neither ran tournaments or were affiliated with the US Chess Federation (USCF). The nearest substantial clubs were in Worcester, Westford, Billerica, Boston, and Attleboro. Pinches and Bond therefore decided to found a new club in Framingham, affiliated with both the USCF and the Massachusetts Chess Association (MACA), to offer a high level of services to a broad spectrum of players.

The club was launched on May 3, 1983, at the American Legion, 11 Beech Street, Framingham, a site it has occupied ever since. The opening night was an Open House featuring a simultaneous exhibition, in which 17-time state champion John Curdo took on 21 area players at once (losing one, drawing two, and winning 18).

Within three months the club's membership had risen to 40, placing it among the half-dozen largest in Massachusetts. Within a year the club had topped the 100-member mark, making it easily one of the two largest and most active clubs in New England.

The Weeknight Format--Basis of the Club's Success

Nationally-rated chess tournaments are in progress most Tuesdays at the club. Open to any player who is a member of (or joins) the USCF, these tournaments have the participants play one round each Tuesday for three to six weeks. The format is varied from tournament to tournament to reduce the danger of the same players being matched up each time. These tournaments are extremely popular and absorb the majority of the players, though there are always players who drop by just for a friendly, casual game.

The most important weeknight event of the year is the annual club championship, held in April and May. Larry Williams of Worcester won the 1984 Championship, while the 1985 title was shared by Drew Sarkisian of Oxford and Alejandro Beltran of Wayland. The Framingham Challenge Cup, a prestigious invitational tournament comprising the club's top players was also won by Sarkisian, in August 1984. Cumulative points earned in weeknight tournaments through the year count towards a Player of the Year award, won (unofficially) by Phil Wilkins of Newton in 1983, and Paul Heising of Ashland in 1984. Heising had won more tournaments (five) at the club than any other player.

Interspersed between the regular weeknight tournaments are other events. Nationally-rated team matches against other clubs are always popular; in its first two years the Framingham Chess Club has played home-and-home matches against Billerica, Wor-

cester (twice), North Attleboro, Fitchburg (twice), and Westford. The club also periodically runs "speed" tournaments, in which specially-designed clocks limit the game to 10 minutes. Quick thinking is essential in these fun events, in which the players play the clock as much as each other. The club's speed championship is in August; 1983 champion was Sarkisian, while Jack Young of Marlboro won the 1984 title. Also in progress at the club is an ongoing problem-solving competition with prizes awarded every three months; winners to date have been Heising (three times), Larry Pratt of Natick, and Jonathan Warren of Framingham.

Collectively, the club runs more than 20 nationally-rated events each year. In 1984 this made the Framingham Chess Club one of the 20 most active chess organizations in the United States.

"Grand Prix" Tournaments--Framingham Becomes a Focus of Regional Chess

Not content with its Tuesday night meetings, the club soon began offering weekend tournaments as well. The club's first effort, the Framingham Open, October 2-3, 1983, made up for its small size (18 players) by its strength--a former state champion finished seventh. The club has since run several one-day weekend tournaments, drawing 20-30 players each.

Starting in 1984, however, the club established Framingham as a major regional chess center by sponsoring each year in February, June, and September, "Grand Prix" tournaments, part of a national professional chess circuit. With guaranteed prize funds of at least \$1000, these tournaments are designed to attract the best master-class players. The 1st West Suburban Winter Grand Prix, February 4-5, 1984, drew 103 players from 10 states. US Champion International Grandmaster Roman Dzindzichashvili took first, with state champion John Curdo, New England champion Chris Chase, and prominent master Joe Fang tied for second. The 1st West Suburban Summer Grand Prix on June 2-3, 1984 drew a smaller field of 56, though eight states were still represented. In this event a triple tie for first occurred, between former state champions Curdo and Jim Rizzitano, and Worcester prodigy Ilya Gurevich. With this win the 12-year-old Gurevich became the youngest official Master in the US. The 2nd Framingham Open, September 29-30, 1984 was won by Chris Chase and former US Open Champion Grandmaster Arthur Bisguier, ahead of a field of 101 players. The 2nd West Suburban Winter Grand Prix, February 2-3, 1985 saw two Boston-area Masters, Charles Hertan and Russell Garber, push their way to the top in a surprise finish ahead of a field of 110 that included 10 World Chess Federation-rated players.

Framingham has also hosted numerous innovative events, including two regional championships. On May 5-6, 1984 the club hosted the New England Women's Championship, with Cristy Barsky and Yugoslavian student Vesna Dimitrijevic sharing the title. And on March 23-24, 1985, the Framingham Chess Club revived the New England Amateur Team Championship, which drew four-player teams from all parts of New England, and one team (ultimately the winner) from Long Island. Collectively these weekend tournaments established Framingham as one of the most active centers of tournament chess in New England.

Special Events--World-Class Chess Comes to Framingham

The events that most captured the interest of chessplayers and established the reputation of the Framingham Chess Club were not, however, the weekend or weeknight tournaments, but rather the schedule of special events the club has staged in its first two years. The most prominent of these were a series of simultaneous exhibitions by Grandmasters.

Four International Grandmasters visited Framingham in 1984, a record unsurpassed by any other club in the US that year. On February 6 US Champion Roman Dzindzichashvili faced 17 players, and a barrage of questions from the spectators in an informal Q&A session. June 12 is was the legendary Sammy Reshevsky, 72 years young and fresh from a major tournament victory in Iceland. Reshevsky had won the US Championship eight times from 1932 to 1972, and had been a challenger for the World Championship in 1948. He is ranked as one of the 10 highest-rated players in world history. However, the greatest excitement was created by the visit of former World Champion Boris Spassky, who lectured to a packed hall and took on 29 opponents in the exhibition that followed on September 30. Originally Spassky was scheduled to appear only in New York, Chicago, and Framingham, though when these exhibitions were immediately sold out, he ultimately added almost 20 other appearances. Finally, on October 16 Framingham hosted the first American appearance of British Champion Nigel Short, then at age 19 the youngest Grandmaster in the world. In late 1985 Framingham is slated to be one of three American sites for exhibitions by Zsuzsa Polgar of Hungary, the highest-rated woman chessplayer in the world--at age 15.

Leading New England players were also featured in simultaneous exhibitions at the club; in addition to John Curdo on opening night, the club has hosted Jim Rizzitano, another state champion, in October 1983, and the first exhibition by Patrick Wolff, who went on to become Massachusetts and US Junior Champion, in January 1984.

Special events are not limited to simultaneous exhibitions. One event that attracted widespread interest was the showing on June 5, 1985 of two rare chess movies, the 1978 documentary "The Great Chess Movie", and the 1925 Russian silent comedy, "Chess Fever".

Not all of the club's special projects have succeeded, though the club's directors have been pleased even to have come close on some projects. In 1968 Scottish International Master David Levy bet that ten years later he would still be able to beat the strongest chess computer in the world--a daring bet considering the rapid progress in computer engineering. In fact, he was able to win his bet by defeating the computer world champion in 1978. By March 1984, however, further progress in chess computers sparked interest in a rematch, and three cities bid to become the match venue--Paris, Los Angeles, and Framingham. The not-yet-year-old Framingham Chess Club was awarded the match due to its superior organization abilities. Unfortunately the match negotiations broke down due to additional demands by Levy, who later organized the match himself in London (and again won easily).

At the same time, three-time World Championship challenger Viktor Kortchnoi was planning to visit New York, and agreed to stop over in Framingham en route back to Switzerland. (When the Levy match broke down, Kortchnoi briefly discussed taking Levy's place!) Unfortunately due to ill health Kortchnoi cancelled his entire American visit.

Also in the spring of 1984, the Framingham Chess Club arranged to play a first-ever international match between chess clubs by shortwave radio. The Milan, Italy chess club was to be the opponent. Unfortunately the club was repeatedly frustrated in coordinating the availability of a local radio "ham" with the schedule of the Milanese, and ultimately ceded the option for this historic match to an Athol, MA chess club who had a resident "ham". Scheduling problems also bedevilled arrangements for other Grandmaster visits; among the Grandmasters who contacted the Framingham Chess Clubs to arrange simulms were Dutch champion Gennadi Sosonko, and World Championship contenders Bent Larsen of Denmark and Lajos Portisch of Hungary.

A major ongoing project of the club in its first year was the publication of a club magazine, The Pawn Storm. Eight monthly issues were produced before the club had to suspend publication in March 1984. Each issue averaged 25 pages of tournament news, crosstables, feature articles,

news, crosstables, feature articles, games, problems, and columns on openings, endgames, tournament rules, and postal chess. This major enterprise greatly enhanced the club's reputation and augmented its membership rolls. Several visiting Grandmasters rated it the best local chess journalism they had seen in the world. The club hopes to revive this ambitious effort in the future.

Servicing the Novice

The most important organizational efforts of the club, however, have been more prosaic: the attraction of many new players into the game, and helping them build up their playing strength. (The club offers discounts on USCF membership to attract new members into organized chess.) Periodically the club schedules "Seminar Nights" in which several of the club's leading players offer instruction on a variety of topics. (Even on regular club nights, many of the club's stronger players can be seen informally offering game analysis for the lower-rated players.) Distinguished lecturers are sometimes invited, most notably John Curdo on October 9, 1984. The club also stages introductory tournaments designed for players with no tournament experience, to provide a less traumatic introduction to the world of competitive chess. And in late 1985 the club plans a major program to develop chess clubs, tournaments and instructional programs in elementary and high schools in the Framingham area. In other services, the club is the major source of chess information in the area, with bulletin boards and flyers of club, regional, national, and international news. The club also maintains an extensive library of chess books for its members' use.

The Organizers

Founders Mark Bond and Warren Pinches acted as President and Executive Director from May to October 1983, when a full slate of officers was elected. Tom Zuppa of Watertown, a bureau chief for the Middlesex News, was elected President, with longtime Framingham player and organizer John Gibbons as Vice-President. Pinches remained Executive Director and Treasurer, with Bond and Glenn Gates of Waltham Members-at-Large. In March 1984 the regular cycle of annual elections began; the only change was Bond's retirement, replaced by Paul McClanahan of West Roxbury. An additional Member-at-Large position was created in December 1984 for David Palmer of Natick. March 1985 elections returned Zuppa as President, David Palmer as Vice-President, Pinches still as Executive Director and Treasurer, and Gates, McClanahan, and Paul Heising of Ashland as Members-at-Large.

The organizers have been active in chess beyond the club as well. Zuppa authors a weekly chess column in the Middlesex News, which has been responsible for a great expansion of chess interest and activity in the MetroWest area. When a major international chess match between the US and British champions was staged in Foxboro, Pinches (one of the handful of Senior-level tournament directors in New England) was selected as Chief Match Arbiter, and Zuppa coordinated the press coverage and personally directed much of the television filming. Pinches, Zuppa, and Drew Sarkisian also serve on the MACA Board of Directors, Pinches as Vice-President. Zuppa holds the crucial "cabinet" posts of Budget and Promotion, while Pinches is the coordinator for clubs, prisons, and major projects.

The Future

The energy and enthusiasm of the Framingham Chess Club continues unabated; the club plans a steady expansion of services to its members in late 1985. There is no question that Framingham will remain a major focus of New England chess for many years to come.