

2005 MCC Summer Scholastics Program Final Report

By Kenneth Ballou
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Summary

The sixth annual MetroWest Chess Club Summer Scholastics Program was held on six consecutive Thursdays from 30 June 2005 through 4 August 2005. A total of 37 players participated in the program. While this may seem to be a low number (especially when compared with previous years), it is actually a surprisingly good turnout. Planning for this year's event took place almost literally at the last minute, and details of the program were only available on the MetroWest Chess Club web site nine days before the program started.

This year, we tried a new format for the program. In previous years, we had three consecutive tournaments, each of which ran three weeks. Each tournament comprised six rounds with a time control of G/30.

This year, we ran a "Challenge" tournament of six rounds played at a time control of G/60. This tournament was open to all players who would be under 15 years of age as of the end of the tournament, with no rating restriction. In parallel with the Challenge tournament, we had two consecutive Reserve tournaments, each running three weeks. The Reserve tournaments followed the format of previous years' programs. The time control was G/30, and there were two rounds per night. All players who would be under 15 years of age as of the end of the summer scholastics program and who were rated under 900 or were unrated were eligible for the Reserve tournaments.

This experiment was highly successful. We received several appreciative comments for the opportunity the Challenge tournament gave our more experienced participants to play "serious" chess. Also, shortening the program from nine weeks to six makes the summer scholastics program a more merciful experience for the tournament directors and adult volunteers. I believe it is also beneficial because it allows us to finish early in August, avoiding many conflicts with family vacations and finishing well before the new school year begins. (August is a popular month for summer vacations.)

We also made significant modifications to the prize structure. We eliminated all cash prizes. In my opinion, this is a good thing; I'm not really a believer in cash prizes for scholastic events. We also eliminated the MACA memberships from previous years. Finally, instead of offering a choice of an MCC logo hat or shirt, we only offered hats. This was just a simplifying move. Hats are easier to deal with primarily because size is not a consideration. It also allowed us to purchase prizes in advance.

Participation

We had 20 players in the Challenge tournament, 15 players in the First Reserve tournament, and 18 players in the Second Reserve tournament. A total of 14 players played in both the First Reserve and Second Reserve tournaments.

Financials

The 2005 summer scholastics program earned a small profit for the club.

Income

Challenge tournament entry fees	\$392 (note 1)
Reserve tournament entry fees	\$276 (note 2)
Total income	\$668

Expenses

Trophies (nine total) and medals	\$152.35
AlphaGraphics (photocopies)	\$140.49 (note 3)
Staples (sign holders and photocopies)	\$24.65 (note 4)
MCC logo hats	\$184.50 (note 5)
USCF rating report	\$21.78
Total expenses	\$533.77

The net profit for the 2005 Summer Scholastic Program was \$144.23.

Notes

1. The entry fee for the Challenge tournament was \$20. The \$392 entry fees collected reflects 19 players who paid the full \$20 entry fee and one player who entered in the fourth week of the tournament and paid a reduced entry fee of \$12.
2. The entry fee for both Reserve tournaments together was \$20. The entry fee for a single Reserve tournament was \$12. The \$276 entry fees collected reflects 9 players who paid \$20 to play in both tournaments and 5 players who paid \$12 to play in one tournament. Three players who entered the third week (the last week of the first Reserve tournament) were also given a discounted entry fee of \$12. Since these players were not in contention for any prizes in the First reserve tournament, we allowed them to play the last week of the tournament for free. Finally, two players (Jack Phelps and Nikulas Barkarson) were given complimentary entries in appreciation of Matt Phelp's invaluable assistance with the program.
3. The AlphaGraphics expense covered printing of entry forms and player handouts. We have a large number of player handouts left over from the program. Since we separated the handouts into a small document that contains information specific to the year's program and a larger document that should not change from year to year, we can use these handouts in the 2006 program. Also, the cost of these copies seems to be rather high. We should consider whether it would be worth

- spending a bit of time at the Staples self-service copy center to reduce the cost of handouts.
4. The Staples expense includes three plastic sign holders (\$6.50 each) and photocopies. The sign holders are currently in use at the regular MCC Tuesday night events. We are using them at registration at round 1 to announce the sections and entry fee for that month's event. We are also using them to advertise merchandise (shirts, caps) bearing the club logo.
 5. We originally announced that we would award hats with the MCC logo to all players who scored four or more points in the Challenge tournament or eight or more points in the two Reserve tournaments combined. (These hats would be awarded independent of trophies for first, second, and third place.) It turned out this would have resulted in only three hats being awarded. We decided to relax the requirements for hats, requiring only 3.5 points (a plus score) in the Challenge tournament and 7 points in both Reserve tournaments combined. (In all cases, half point byes did not count for the point requirement for a hat.) We awarded nine hats using the relaxed requirements.

Publications and Handouts

We invested considerable effort this year in our handouts. We have taken the player's handbook from previous years and separated it into four overlapping documents:

1. A Player's Handbook. This document is a comprehensive handbook that can also serve as a general introduction to rated chess tournaments. This document currently consists of 20 pages.
2. An abridged Player's Handbook. This document is a subset of the comprehensive handbook consisting of 11 pages.
3. A year-specific supplement to the Player's Handbook. This is a short document that contains the details of the current year's program. The 2005 version contains the details of the Challenge and Reserve tournaments, the event dates, and the prizes.
4. An "Introduction to Recording Game Moves" document. This four page document is a standalone explanation of chess notation.

The intent of the abridged player's handbook is to reduce cost and waste. The abridged handbook contains the basic information the player and parents need. The full handbook contains more detailed information. We printed enough copies so that every player could take a copy of the abridged handbook and the year-specific supplement. We had several copies of the full handbook available at the club for reference, but we did not encourage players to take copies of the full handbook. (Of course, all documents are available in PDF format from the MCC web site.)

I recommend that the club consider sharing these documents widely. These could be a useful resource for other chess clubs and for MACA. This would also generate publicity for the club.

Observations and Lessons Learned

We were very fortunate to have the good turnout we did given how late we were to announce the program. It was really no individual person's fault that the planning for the program happened as late as it did. However, the late start probably did affect attendance. We should be sure to establish the details of the 2006 program far enough in advance that we can advertise on the MCC web site before the end of the school year. We should also be sure to send an announcement of the program to the schools in the MetroWest region. Schools that have chess clubs should be interested in the program.

The experiment of having both a Challenge tournament and a Reserve tournament was quite successful. However, this format does place additional demands on physical space. The players in the Reserve tournament are younger and tend to be more "enthusiastic." These players tend not to be quiet, and they absolutely require a separate space from the Challenge tournament players.

One problem is that the large room at the Kennedy Senior Center really isn't suitable to having the Challenge and Reserve players together. Even if we were to put the two tournaments at opposite ends of the room, the noise from the Reserve tournament will be much too distracting to the Challenge tournament players. We solved this problem by placing the Reserve players in the small room in front of the large room (where we put the overflow when the Tuesday events are too large for the main room). However, at the end of the program, we had filled the small room. If the turnout for the Reserve tournaments were larger, we would probably have to use the room across the hall (the Tuesday night skittles room) for the Reserve tournament. This would possibly lead to a problem accommodating the parents.

We had one unfortunate scheduling conflict. The Chess School also met Thursday evenings (the second Thursday of each month), and we had a conflict Thursday, 14 July. We explained the situation to the parents, who understood the situation and made do without the skittles room that night. Again, we were fortunate that the Reserve tournament fit in the small overflow room.

We purchased trophies and medals from Crown Awards. Through my own fault, I was late ordering the trophies (we needed to have the trophies available for the first Reserve tournament by the third week, 14 July). Crown Awards not only completed our order in time, but the trophies were actually delivered to my house one day early. I have nothing but praise for Crown Awards as a result. Their prices are reasonable and their service is excellent. I recommend continuing to purchase trophies and medals from them.

The medals I purchased were generic chess medals. We bought (and awarded) 35 medals at a cost of \$1.99 per medal. Crown Awards can also make custom medals for \$2.79/medal for one hundred medals. I suggest we should consider having Crown Awards create medals with the MCC logo (which is conveniently circular in shape) to award to participants in the scholastic program. If we do so, we should be careful that the ribbons are **not** year-specific, since we would use a lot of 100 medals over a period of perhaps three years.

I was pleasantly surprised that the parents were quite cooperative with respect to staying out of the playing rooms while tournament games were in progress. In fact, I believe many of this year's participants were veterans of previous years' programs. The parents seemed to know the drill fairly well.

I believe we could make some use of the time parents spend waiting for their children. We could have a volunteer on hand to explain tournament chess to the parents and to answer any questions the parents might have. Perhaps we might also find that some of the parents are interested in playing chess and might become MCC members.

If we had a volunteer available, we might also be able to increase the value of the summer program by having short "clinics" before the round starts at 7:30. I would suggest that even 20 to 30 minutes might prove helpful to the younger players. For example, I saw Reserve players fumble around trying to checkmate an opponent with a rook (or even just one queen), and there were several games that ended in stalemate even though (or perhaps because) one side had an overwhelming material advantage. It wouldn't necessarily require a high rated player to run such a clinic.

Recommendation for Summer 2006

I strongly recommend that the MetroWest Chess Club hold a seventh annual Summer Scholastic Program using the same format as this year's program. If we run the program on Thursday evenings, the 2006 program should start 29 June 2006 and end 3 August 2006.