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Interview: Tim Redman remembers American Dean of Chess Arnold Denker

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MADELEINE BRAND, host: They called him the Dean of American Chess. Arnold **Denker** died this week at the age of 90. **Denker** said his devotion to chess was why he stayed mentally fit his whole life. During his nearly 70-year career in chess, **Denker** lost only one match. Not only a top competitor, **Denker** was also a mentor for other young players, including chess giant Bobby Fischer. **Denker** is remembered fondly by his friend and fellow chess enthusiast Tim Redman, who runs the chess program at the University of Texas at Dallas. Redman told me how **Denker** earned the coveted Dean of American Chess title. *

Mr. TIM REDMAN (Friend and Fellow Chess Enthusiast of Arnold **Denker**): That's a title that was awarded to him by the US Chess Federation executive board. There have only been two other Deans of American Chess: Hermann Helms and George Koltanowski. Arnie was the third.

BRAND: Why were there only three?

Mr. REDMAN: It's a title of the highest honor that can be given to an American in chess, someone that has given his life to the game and has attracted a great deal of renown and is really the selfless pursuit of the value of chess.

BRAND: And what does that mean practically?

Mr. REDMAN: Well, I think the best example is that Arnie **Denker**, 20-some years ago, started the **Denker** Tournament for high school state chess champions. He got together the state champions, all the state high school champions from all around the country every year, and they played against each other, and the **Denker** Tournament emerged. And University of Texas at Dallas, as a matter of fact, gives a full scholarship to the winner of the **Denker** Tournament every year, mostly 'cause of what Arnie did.

BRAND: And how would you compare him to--I think probably most people know the name Kasparov...

Mr. REDMAN: Yes.

BRAND: ...as a chess champion. How would you compare Arnold **Denker** to Kasparov?

Mr. REDMAN: Arnie's heyday was in the '30s and '40s, but back then, the 1930s, the American chess--the national American chess team dominated world chess, and Arnie was a part of that. As a grand master, as a player, he was known for his ferocious attacking ability. Kasparov, many other players, play pawn to queen four. It's an opening move to get into positional quiet games. Arnie played pawn to queen four to checkmate his opponent as soon as possible. So in terms of total skill, Kasparov was certainly the greater player historically, but Arnie was at the top of his game in the '30s and '40s. He never lost a match. He beat Reshevsky. He beat Fine. So he was a leading American grand master from that time.

BRAND: So would he be one of those guys you'd see furiously slapping down the timer and

making his move?

Mr. REDMAN: Absolutely. He loved to play rapid chess. He was passionate about it, and, you know, as they say, he played his last game, as I know, two weeks ago, so he was a passionate chess player.

BRAND: And so what do you think his legacy will be?

Mr. REDMAN: Well, the **Denker** Tournament of high school champions without question. The **Denker** Tournament has gone on for more than 20 years, and he's got an alumni group that we're talking about nearly a thousand players now who've participated. That and his book, "The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories," which was an award-winning book. But for a chess player, the games are the key, and Arnie's games will live.

BRAND: Do people study his games?

Mr. REDMAN: Of course. I study his games. I want to know how he did it.

BRAND: What have you found out?

Mr. REDMAN: I've found out that you should play pawn to queen four and go for checkmate, not this boring positional stuff. Just go for it.

BRAND: OK, words to live by.

Mr. REDMAN: I hope so.

BRAND: At least play chess by.

Mr. REDMAN: Yes.

BRAND: Well, thank you very much.

Mr. REDMAN: OK.

BRAND: Tim Redman is the director of the chess program at the University of Texas at Dallas.

(Credits)

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