

# Rook 'em Comets

*UTD again at pinnacle of college chess —  
and recruits to continue*

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\* **U**niversity of Texas at Dallas junior Peter Vavrak and his fellow teammates play squash, racquetball and soccer three or four times a week to stay in shape — for chess.

"It's because sometimes the [chess] game can take up to six hours," Vavrak said. "People don't think it's tiring, but it's extremely tiring. If you are in good shape, you can focus more and have more energy I play squash."

Vavrak is a member of the UTD chess team that has won the Final Four of college chess two times and took or tied for first place four times in the Pan American Intercollegiate Team Chess Tournament, including last year.

On May 22, the team traveled to Minneapolis and won the award for best college team and \$3,500 at the HB Global Chess Challenge, the most lucrative open chess tournament in history.

Competing for UTD were members of the university's top team — Michal Kujovic, a senior majoring in statistics; Magesh Chandran Panchanathan; a junior majoring in computer science; Dimitry Schneider, a sophomore business administration major; Amon Simutowe, a sophomore majoring in economics and finance; and Vavrak, who majors in business administration.

UTD and the University of Maryland-Baltimore County are widely considered the two best college chess programs in the nation. UMBC edged UTD for

the 2005 national championship in April.

When Tim Redman, professor of literary studies in the school of arts and humanities at UTD and director of the chess program, started the team 10 years ago, he didn't realize the chess team would become so popular.

"You could say that the other University of Texas has a football team and we have a chess team, and I think that just illustrates the difference of both schools," Redman said. "I personally think that the hi-tech workforce of the 21st century will come from the chess players and not football players, [but] they may prove me wrong."

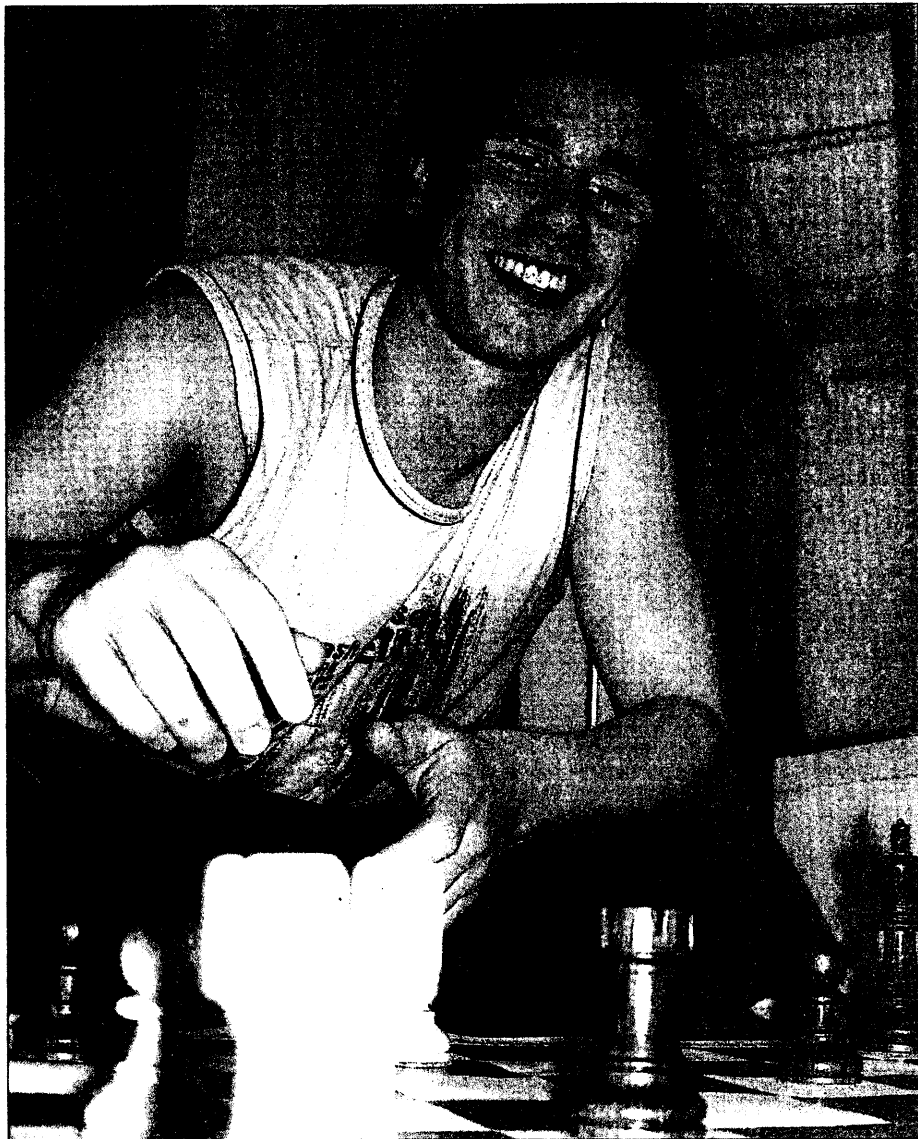
Redman said the chess team has a strong following at UTD and has sparked such events as "ChessFest" — a sort of pep rally for the chess team before they head off to major competitions.

"One area where we're not different from football is physical training," Redman said. "[Chess team members] all have to pursue some physical activity."

Another aspect of the UTD chess team that compares to football is recruiting. Jim Stallings, the associate director of the team, is in charge of finding players for the team. He looks for strong players from Ecuador to China, keeping up with their playing records on a spreadsheet, and even offers chess scholarships.

"We're one of the very first to give [chess] scholarships," Stallings said. "Some of these scholarships we give to students as young as sixth grade — it'll keep them focused for the next six years to make good grades."

Last month, in fact, UTD offered three scholarships — four years of all tuition and fees... a "full ride" in athletics parlance — to the top performers at the SuperNationals of Chess last month. High school champion Xiao Cheng, 15, of Alpharetta, Ga.; junior high titlist Joel Banawa, 15, of Los Angeles; and elementary school champion Ray Robson, 10, of Largo, Fla. The only stipulation is that the winners must meet



SONIA MOGHE/STAFF PHOTO

Peter Vavrak, a member of the UTD chess team, practices before a tournament Friday.

UTD's entrance requirements at matriculation.

Vavrak, a psychology major from Slovakia, said he spends about one hour a day practicing chess, depending on how much schoolwork he has, and before tournaments he goes on the computer and studies opening

moves other chess players use from information found on internet databases.

"Online, there are games that are played recently," Vavrak said. "I look at what is successful."

Stallings said that lately at chess tournaments, students

bring their laptops to study opening moves before their next games, but Vavrak feels that computers aren't completely beneficial.

"Sometimes I feel computers do more damage than advantage," Vavrak said. "It [becomes] more like a science and less like