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## Rook Work

### *Professor's love of chess helps create club, recruit for Tech*

By Ruth Bradley/Contributing Writer  
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Bobby Fischer was picky. His bid for the position of world champion of chess in 1972 almost did not take place because of his demands about location, setting and pay. The American ingenue was "difficult to like," said observer Haraldur Karlsson. Yet, when Fischer began to play chess, it didn't matter.

"When Fischer sat down, it was like Mozart sat down at the chess board," he said. "He was truly a genius."

Karlsson, an associate professor of geosciences at Texas Tech, said the match was more than a game between two people. It was east versus west, with the underlying current of the Cold War driving their confrontation.

"[The Russians] thought they could prove their system was superior to the U.S. by beating them," Karlsson said.

When Fischer won the match Sept. 1, his victory gave hope to America and instigated a national interest in chess - an interest Karlsson hopes to continue to build.

An adviser for the Tech Knight Raider chess club, Karlsson's lifelong love of the game motivates him to spread awareness of its benefits to both the college and the community.

"This is actually a way to get people interested in science and math," he said. "There's room for all kinds of personalities. And it's kind of an international language."

\* One of Karlsson's main goals is to create a scholarship at Tech for students who excel at chess, like those at the University of Texas at Dallas and the University of Maryland-Baltimore.

"They pull in some of the brightest minds in the country," he said.

Karlsson said he believes such a program could even attract high-ranking master players to Tech.

"Many chess players are very developed in their mental activities," said Dr. Sheryl Santos, dean and professor for the College of Education. "It seems to go hand in hand."

Santos said Karlsson's idea could serve as a magnet to interest great minds in Texas Tech.

"I think if Texas Tech could be known as the hotbed of chess players, I think we would be doing ourselves a big favor," she said.

Karlsson said he would like to see scholarship recipients teach chess to local students as part of their scholarship requirements. In this way, he would promote another one of his projects: bringing chess to schools.

"We basically teach them to think," he said. "That's all it is."

Twice a week, Karlsson and a group of students teach chess to a group of more than 50 kindergarten through sixth grade students at Rameriz Charter School.

Karlsson said the mental skills these children are learning apply to all areas of life, from math and science to logic and decision making.

Joanne Newman, university coordinator for Ramirez Charter School, said the program has been very good for the school.

"I personally believe it has helped them," she said. "If nothing else, it gives them a confidence boost. I look for this to be something that's done more in other schools."

Karlsson said he also wants to see schools across the nation get involved, and he believes the Internet offers unique opportunities for them to do so.

"I see the computers as a way of linking people," he said. "You can go on the Internet and you can play someone in Russia, or anywhere in the world."

Last year, Karlsson set up a match for 16 Ramirez students against 16 students from a school in Iceland. The students played each other across a special network from their school's computer labs. Karlsson said this idea could be applied nationwide, and for little cost, thousands of schools could compete against each other.

But that's the big picture. For now, Karlsson is focused on the immediate future: his work at Ramirez, weekly chess meetings and tournaments with the Knight Raiders, and a special event he is working to create for the Texas Panhandle area, featuring special guest Susan Polgar, the

first woman to earn the men's grandmaster title.

The event will consist of two tournaments, one for students and one open to the public, an opportunity for Polgar to speak and a special simultaneous exhibition match, where Polgar will play several people at one time. The event is scheduled at Tech, Nov. 12 - 13. More information is available at [www.texaschess.org](http://www.texaschess.org) under Region I Scholastic Championships.

Karlsson said events like this benefit the community.

"It generates local pride," he said.

For Karlsson, this pride is just one of the benefits of chess and one of the reasons for his passion.

"I don't see the logic, don't see the math," he said. "I see a certain type of creativity, poetry, too. They're not just dead pieces to me."

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