Chess kings prove to be brawny pawns

Kevin Sherrington

Over the weekend, bravity at the University of Texas-Dallas vanquished not only the Exterminator, but the Mongolian Terror as well. The World Chess Hall of Fame and Maryland-Baltimore County at UNBC had the game, as they do? Discover a medical cure? A fungal herbicide? Go WP on us? Nah. The Final Four. So then, what does that mean for the Exterminator? Nothing. And not that weak stuff beating William. The Exterminator now must choose between Maryland and Indiana for five hours for the KINGS Page 6B.
Kings prove pawns can have more fun

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institutions. But they had no prayer against coach Rade Milovanovic and the boys with the big brains.

Harvard and Stanford cull chess teams from the general student body, which is like Mike Dement walking into a P.E. class at SMU and asking who wants to hoop against Duke.

UTD gives chess scholarships, a program in place for six years with a half-dozen Texas schools now doing the same. Only UTD has a $150,000 budget and a designated recruiter to boot.

A few locals make the UTD bench on general academic excellence. Others qualify by winning chess competitions. But the starters are prodigies, and they are world class.

Team captain Yury Shulman, 26, is from Belarus. The roster also includes a player from Poland and another from Sweden and one from Russia by way of Michigan.

They even have a guy from Alabama.

Chess is no hobby with this bunch. Back in Belarus, Shulman was classified along with Olympic athletes at a state-run sports university, where everyone trained in their discipline and took a little biochemistry on the side. By law, all student athletes were gainfully employed.

“At the same time, you never show up at your job,” Shulman said, smiling. “It’s a funny system.”

Here in Texas, Yuri, we called it the Southwest Conference.

Football and basketball recruiting, we understand. The idea of going hard after someone good with his queen still takes some getting used to.

Actual conversation between Redman and another UTD faculty member:

Prof: “Any recruiting scandals?”

Redman: “No, but we’re working on it.”

A professor of literary studies at UTD and a former master player himself, Redman came up with the idea for a chess team after administrators brainstormed for ways to promote the university.

So far, it’s working. UTD’s chess team figured prominently in a USA Today story last week, and the team received a letter of congratulations last year from senator Kay Bailey Hutchison.

Hutchison, a former Texas cheerleader, understands competition in any form. Some are harder to educate, even at a place like UTD.

Actual conversation recently between Redman and a university administrator:

Dean: “How’s Yuri doing?”

Redman: “He just won the World Open.”

Dean: “Is that good?”

Word is getting around slowly at UTD. Officials claim they’ve had pep rallies and such, but there were no reports this weekend of campus mobs overturning Saabs.

A local TV station called UTD spokesman Jon Senderling and asked about interviewing the team at the airport Monday, wondering if 700 or 800 students might be on hand.

“Probably just you and me,” Senderling said.

Alas, he proved accurate. But the UTD chess wizzes were unfazed, exhilarated over their performance.

Victory wrings a variety of emotions, though. Before playing Battsetseg “The Mongolian Terror” Tsagaan of UMBC, Andrew Whatley admitted that he wanted to “strike fear” in his Tatarstan opponent.

Standing over the fallen Terror, he went soft. “It was kinda weird,” said Whatley, a senior economics and finance major. “A lot should be made of winning for the school’s sake, but there’s always a loser, too. I got to see the personal aspect, how they felt.

“You should just play for the joy of chess.”

This, from the “Hammer from Alabamer.”

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