



LEARNING: PHOTOS / JANE FREEMAN

AHEAD OF THE GAME: University of Texas students Andrew Whatley, left, and Andrei Zarembs compete in the Pan-Am Intercollegiate Chess Championships, which resume today at the Providence Marriott Hotel. High school students are competing in the event for a \$30,000 college scholarship.

WAR IN PIECES

Chess prodigies meet their match at Pan-Am games in Providence

BY GERALD M. CARBONE
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — On one side of the board, playing black, sat Chris Toolin, a Barrington High School sophomore who learned the game of chess while in daycare.

On the other side, playing white, sat Ryan Militis, of Pittsburgh, also a sophomore, and also a chess prodigy.

At stake in yesterday's game was a college scholarship worth \$10,000.

The Toolin vs. Militis match was one of many intense chess games unfolding yesterday at the Providence Marriott Hotel, site of this year's Pan-Am Intercollegiate Chess Championships. The tournament, featuring college teams from Peru, Duquesne, Stanford, Harvard, MIT and Rhode Island College, continues today at 11 a.m. Quiet spectators are welcome, and admission is free.

For a small state school, Rhode Island College considerably fields an amazingly good chess team, RIC is believed to be the first school to offer scholarship money to proven chess players, and this year that money paid off in a big way: RIC paid senior Seneca Nowland \$150 to play on its chess team last semester.



CONTEMPLATION: Barrington High School sophomore Chris Toolin studies his board.

Nowland, an Oregon native, persuaded organizers of the Pan-Am championships to hold this year's tournament in Providence, bringing more than 100 chess players into the city. The competitors rented 75 rooms at the Marriott for three nights — not a bad return on the state's \$850.

Nowland came to Rhode Island as a freshman because he knew of RIC's reputation as a good chess school. After pecking with a Pan-

'You hate your opponent's guts when you're sitting at the board. They're the enemy till they surrender, then you're friends again.'

Larry Civicharasin,
460-466 U.S. Chess
center/100

Chess

Continued from Page A-3

An championship in 1985, the college's chess program had been on the downslope until Nowland became the chess club president. Besides luring the Pan-Am team to Providence, he drove to Cambridge, Mass., last summer and recruited Larry Christiansen to coach the Rhode Island College team.

Christiansen, a big man with bushy eyebrows, is an international grandmaster and two-time U.S. champion. He's so good that even the best collegiate players in the nation yesterday asked him to autograph copies of his book *Storming the Barricades*.

As the book's title suggests, Christiansen plays an aggressive game. "It's war," Christiansen said. "You hate your opponent's guts when you're sitting at the board. They're the enemy till they surrender, then you're friends again."

Christiansen is well known for staging improbable comebacks. He once came back from being a couple of key pieces down, forcing his opponent to cry — "to my satisfaction," Christiansen said.

Yesterday's wars were waged in near silence beneath the chandeliers of the hotel's ballroom. The two collegiate powerhouses — the University of Texas at Dallas and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, squared off at the same time the two high school sophomores battled for the scholarship money.

Every year the University of Texas at Dallas gives a full, four-year scholarship to the best high school player at the Pan-Am tournament. The Texas team wears dark blazers monogrammed with the school's logo; the Rhode Island College team wears whatever's comfortable.

Yesterday's scholarship matches began with a tournament official reading the rules: "You are allowed to leave this room to use the bathroom. Don't talk to anybody — you don't talk to your mom, you don't talk to your dad, you don't talk to your coach. To the bathroom and back, that's it."

"Shake hands and wish your opponent good luck."

At board No. 1, Toolin of Barrington and Milisits of Pittsburgh shook hands, then the war began.

Toolin bent low, his chin inches from the pieces, his face flushed. He brought a book to the table called *New Ideas in the Sveshnikov Sicilian*, because he planned on playing a Sicilian opening.

Milisits, jiggling his right thigh, carried the action early. He established a diagonal row of pawns that slashed five rows deep.

Toolin looked to be on the defensive. Then he made the first kill, taking a pawn with a pawn.

Milisits set his hands on his forehead while he mulled whether to capture the killing pawn; he did, using a knight. Then he sneezed, politely, glancing from the table.

A series of exchanges seemed to open the board for Toolin. Shortly before noon, grandmaster Christiansen analyzed the game and whispered, "I'd say the kid who's black [Toolin] is killing the guy who's white. It should be over quickly. It's terrible, very terrible. He's got a nice attack."

Literally one wrong move — one piece, one square, could cost either player a \$30,000 scholarship. And at 12:37 p.m. — 2½ hours into the game — Toolin took a pawn with his bishop, a move that did not impress Christiansen: "He really didn't have to make that move, his last one."

By midafternoon, Milisits seemed to be pulling a Christiansen-type comeback. And more than four hours after the game began, Milisits won it. Milisits did not necessarily win the scholarship — last night he faced a formidable foe in Max Maloyan, a Russian immigrant from Pawrucket's Shea High School. Through Milisits was highly favored, a Maloyan victory would create possibilities for any one of three people to take the \$30,000 scholarship.

While Milisits was putting the final touches on his game, Maryland and Texas were playing to a draw. Rhode Island College had already swept Toroxan's B team, setting up the possibility for a top 5 finish.

It all gets resolved when the wars resume at 10 a.m. today.