

FIVE WIN TITLES IN PAN AM GAMES

Written by *FM Acta Friedman* when the USCF called me a while back and asked if I'd be willing to coach the American team for the Pan American games in Brazil. I took very little time in accepting. I have never been below the Equator and naturally, a visit to such an exotic country sounded fascinating: Brazil — the land of rain forests, samba and a true joy of life alongside poverty and corruption and, of course, soccer!

As I quickly learned, all the pre-trip reading I have done wasn't going to prepare me for this experience. I think I speak for most of the players and parents who traveled — this wasn't like most trips.

On September 30th, after flying from different U.S. cities, the delegation met in its entirety in the southern town of Matinhos. We got there after about nine hours of flight from the States to São Paulo (or Rio for some), another one-hour domestic flight to the city of Curitiba, and then an hour and a half more by bus.

The stopover in Curitiba's international airport gave the first hint for things to come: No one there spoke English, not even at the information desk. Going with the odds, I decided to skip any tries at using my mother tongue, Hebrew, and realized it is high time for some quick learning of Portuguese or at least some Spanish. There were 13 of us meeting at our three-star hotel (more about that soon): seven participants, me, and parents of some of the players.

THE TEAM

Our team consisted of Justin Sarkar, Noah Belcher, Anna Levina, and Katie Pelletier from New York, Hana Ikkis from New Jersey, Daniel Fernandez from Florida, and Cory Evans from California. I was rightly optimistic about this group of talented and capable players, having met some of them in the past. We didn't know how strong the opposition would be, but we were coming "armed!"

Checking into the hotel quickly revealed that in Brazil three stars did not mean the same as they would in Europe. Try to think of some motel you might have stayed at, on some road trip where fatigue forced you to compromise, and you might guess the level of this one. We shrugged it off with a smile since, after all, we came to play and not vacation. That same evening the opening ceremony was held in a gymnasium, with speeches and announcements (in Portuguese only). A local marching band provided the entertainment (an awesome

production of "Twist and Shout!")

The technical captains' meeting that came right after the ceremony was held in Spanish, and thanks to Lorenzo Fernandez (Daniel's father) I got filled in on the part of the meeting (about 85%) that I didn't understand myself.

The event itself started the next day in the town's convention center. Thirteen countries sent 278 players (183 boys and 95 girls) to compete in the five age groups: Under 10, Under 12, Under 14, Under 16 and Under 18, all with different sections for boys and girls. Most participants and coaches were very friendly and all of us made some friends. A lot of credit goes to the organizers, who picked up the gauntlet and organized the event in the last minute after the original host, Mexico, canceled. Special mention should be made of two who really helped with translations, on and off the tournament site and with clarifications of procedures: GM Darcy Lima, the president of the Brazilian Chess Federation, and Chief Arbiter Al Antonio Bento.

THE LOCALE

The conditions of the event were a bit unusual for U.S. players. The playing hall was one large ballroom style area, where the players, the parents, and coaches all stayed. Of course, that made for a noisy environment, with kids running around and people talking while games were in progress. In general, it is fair to conclude that for most delegations, this was a large gathering, a reunion of sorts, where the competition itself was secondary. Our team was very much in the spirit of socializing and making friends, but we also came eager to compete and win.

Since very few chairs were provided in the convention center for the delegations, and no analysis room was provided, we had only a table with a board and pieces on it to look over the games. We often attracted a crowd, and at times even players and parents from other delegations asked me to look over their games or play a casual game.

Since this building was a good half hour walk from our hotel, our team rented a large van with a driver for about seven hours a day. This allowed for some mobility and gave some the chance to see the sites around town. Those were not many, but we got to learn more about the locale. The people are truly wonderful — even with the language barrier, literally all the locals we met and interacted with were accommodating and kind. One could notice an obvious *joie de vivre* and pride in them. There is some poverty but, unlike the big cities, in this small town they find work

in the service industry or in fishing.

Some days local kids, barefoot and raggedly, came to ask for coins. They reminded me of the powerful must-see film *Pavote* about the life of a juvenile in São Paulo's streets and reform schools, but I was glad to learn it was not so.

THE ACTION

Now for the chess action: The team performed remarkably well and, of the seven kids, five took first places in their sections! Our team's top scorer was **Katie Pelletier**, who cruised to clear first place in the Under 10 girls category with a perfect score of 7-0, a point and a half ahead of her next rival! Her style of "just making good moves" with very few mistakes was no match for her opposition. Katie was never in any danger in any of her games. Like I told her: Kasparov couldn't have done better.

Next in line, we have **Justin Sarkar**, who also had a powerful performance, and who finished with 6½-½ in the boys Under 18 section. He gave one draw to his main rival Mauricio Uribe (who might be familiar to some as he plays in the U.S. arena) and had one scare in a later round game, but played good chess. His at-the-board discipline is exemplary: I have not seen him get up during his games! He finished in clear first place, a point ahead of the field.

In the girls' Under 12, **Hana Ikkis** scored a strong 6-1 result. She was very lucky in two of her games where she managed 1½ from what should have been two goose eggs, but indeed luck favors the strong! This talented girl packs a mean punch. Hana also won clear first, a point ahead of her next competitor.

Six points out of seven was also **Daniel Fernandez's** impressive score in the boys' Under 14 group. Daniel played some brutal games, terrorizing his opponents with his aggressive attacking style. He had one setback in Round 6, losing from a better position to his nearest rival (and highest rated player in the event, at over 2300 FIDE) Daniel Micles of Ecuador, after declining a draw. In Round 7, he quickly got back on track with a strong win and took first place on tiebreaks.

In the boys' Under 10 group, **Noah Belcher** played some solid chess with Black and even more dynamically with White for a great 5½-1½ score and first place on tiebreaks. A common denominator in Noah's games was his patience and building for a break that, when it eventually came, left his opponents in trouble.

Next, we have **Anna Levina**, who also

scored 5½-1½ in the girls' Under 14 section, which was good enough for a second place. This is indeed a great result, but being obviously the best player in her section, she was a bit disappointed in not being able to play her best and win it. Anna is usually well prepared in the openings and has a very good positional understanding.

Last but not least, **Cory Evans**, in his international debut, scored 4½-2½ in the boys' Under 12 group. He was quite unlucky in some of his games, and is certainly better than his score might indicate. As a team, we finished in fourth place out of 13, but with only seven of the 10 groups represented. Unfortunately, some kids declined their invitation to the event because of school; otherwise we would have clinched first place.

All winners will be awarded the FM title (or WFM for girls) while Justin's result also qualifies as a nine-round IM norm(3). Additionally, the winners earn a spot for the world youth competition and for next year's Pan American games (provided they play in the same age category). Not a bad deal!

Thanks to the USCF, especially Beatriz Marinello and Sharon Brunetti, for their support; and parents Lorenzo Fernandez, Sharon Evans, Dana Belcher, Victor Levina, and Roz Pelletier, for being an active part of a successful team.

THE GAMES

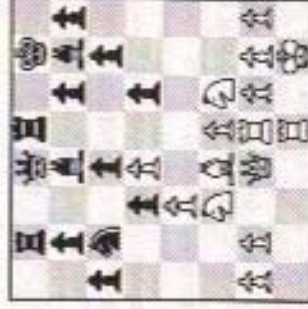
In the first game Noah shows what happens when he gets the initiative:

TROMPOWSKY ATTACK [A45]

W: Noah Belcher (United States)
B: Vicente Accasia (Uruguay)

Panamericano, Brazil, 1999

1. d4 Nf6 2. Bg5 g6 3. Bxh6 exf6 4. e3 Bg7 5. Nf3 0-0 6. Bd3 d6 7. c4 Nd7 8. Nc3 Nb6 9. 0-0 f5 10. Re1 e5 11. Re1 Be6 12. d5 Bd7 13. Qd2 Re8 14. Re2 a6 15. Rce1 Rb8



16. e4 fxe4 17. Nxe4 Ne8 18. Qf4 Qc7 19. Nf6+ Bxf6 20. Qxf6 Na7 21. Re7 Rf8 22. Ng5 Rhe8 23. Nxf7. Black resigns.

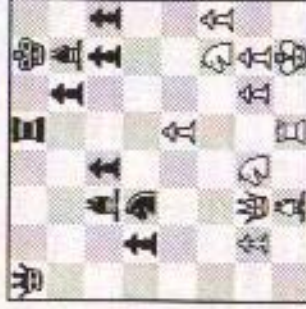
Katie beats her main rival in the event:

RUY LOPEZ [C93]

W: Natalia Butner (Argentina)
B: Katie Pelletier (United States)

Panamericano, Brazil, 1999

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Ne6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Bb4 Nf6 5. 0-0 b5 6. Bb3 Be7 7. Re1 0-0 8. c3 d6 9. b3 Bb7 10. d4 b6 11. Nbd2 Re8 12. Nf1 Bf8 13. Ng3 g6 14. a4 Bg7 15. axb5 axb5 16. Kxa8 Qxa8 17. Be2 exd4 18. cxd4 Nb4 19. d5 Nxc2 20. Qxc2 e6 21. dxc6 Bxc6 22. Nd2 Nd7 23. Nf3 Ne5 24. Nd2



24. ... f5 25. f3 Bd4+ 26. Kh1 Bf2 27. Rf1 Bxg3 28. exf5 Qa4 29. Qh1 Re1 30. fxg6 Bxf1+ 31. Nxf1 Qd1 32. Kg1 Bd5 33. Qa1 Bc4 34. Qa8+ Kg7 35. Bxb6+ Kxg6 36. Qe8+ Bf7 37. Qxb5 Kxb6 38. Qb4 Bf2+ 39. Kh2 Qxh1 40. Qf4+ Kg7 41.

Qg5+ Kh7 42. h4 Qg1+ 43. Kh3 Be6+ 44. Qg4 Qh1 mate.

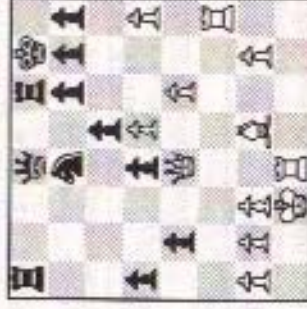
Justin quickly goes into a better endgame where he picks up some pawns and brings the point home.

FRENCH DEFENSE [C11]

W: Jose Cubas Berdnavek (Paraguay)
B: Justin Sarkar (United States)

Panamericano, Brazil, 1999

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. e5 Nfd7 5. f4 e5 6. Nf3 Ne6 7. Be3 cxd4 8. Nxd4 Be5 9. Qd2 0-0 10. 0-0-0 a6 11. h4 Bxd4 12. Bxd4 b5 13. Qe3 b4 14. Ne2 a5 15. Rh3 Ba6 16. h3 Bxe2 17. Bxe2 Nxd4 18. Qxd4



18. ... Qb6 19. Qxb6 Nxb6 20. a3 Nd7 21. Rd4 Rb8 22. Re3 Kf8 23. f5 Rb6 24. Rf4 bxa3 25. bxa3 exf5 26. Rd4 f6 27. Rxd5 Nxe5 28. a4 Rb4 29. Bb5 Rb4 30. Kb2 Rxb5 31. c4 f4 32. Re2 Rb8 33. Kb3 Kg5 34. e5 Rg3+ 35. Kc2 Re8 36. e6 Nxc6 37. Kd1 Ne5 38. Rf2 g5 39. Rfd2 f3 40. gxh3 Nxf3 41. Rf2 Rg1-42. Bf1 g4 43. Rxa5 g3 44. Rxf3 g2 45. Rxf6+ Kg7 46. Rxf5 Rh1 47. Rf7+ Kh8, White resigns.

Daniel demolishes his opponent with some power play:

CARO-KANN DEFENSE [B12]

W: Daniel Fernandez (United States)
B: Guillermo Cabral (Paraguay)

Panamericano, Brazil, 1999

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 Bf5 4. Nc3 e6 5.

Stay on Top of Your Game with Informant 76!

It's all the best value for your dollar! See what your favorite grandmasters are playing ... and learn why, when you check out the ten most important theoretical novelties played between June and September of 1999. Informant 76 includes 500 complexity annotated games as well as almost 400 game fragments. The best conclusions, the best endings, and the ten best games alone will give you hours and hours of enjoyment. FAX: 430 pp. \$2199.

Small Encyclopedia of Chess Openings Chess Informant collects all chess openings in one book of more than 500 pages. Expand your opening repertoire with one of the most trusted publishers in chess literature. FAX: 608 pp. \$2199.

Monograph of Chess Opening - C78 (Roy Lopez) 1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. Bb5 a6 4. b4 Nb6 5. c4 0-0 the moves 5... d6, 5... Nxe4, or 5... Be7. FAX: 136 pp. \$2199.

BO1076IP Informant 76 \$36/\$32.40

BO744IP Encyclopedia \$36/\$32.40

BO753BP Monograph \$16/\$14.40

COMPUTER SAVVY? BLY A

PASSWORD AND DOWNLOAD:

Z076 Informant-76 \$36/\$32.40

Z129 Encyclopedia \$36/\$32.40

Z130 Monograph \$16/\$14.40

TO ORDER 800-388-KING (5464)

FAX 914-561-CHES (2437)

24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK

Visit our website at <http://www.uschess.org>

