D.C. loses a longtime legend

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A news-packed week in local chess begins on a sad note as we mourn the passing of the remarkable Oscar Shapiro, a fixture on the local chess scene who died New Year's Day of cancer at the age of 92. The Boston-born Shapiro was the District champ in the 1940s and 1950s, establishing a record for longevity and quality over the chessboard that may never be matched. Shapiro set a U.S. record by becoming the oldest player ever to achieve a master's ranking - at the ripe age of 74 - and he was an active tournament player until just months before he died. In tribute, we offer one of Shapiro's many wins against notable opponents. His victim here was 20-year-old Hans Berliner, another Washington legend, who would go on to win the world correspondence chess championship. Shapiro won the best-game prize for the win, taken from the 1949 D.C. Championship.

Berliner's unambitious Philidor setup works out relatively well here, as White's Nc3-e2-g3 repositioning gives Black time to equalize with the timely 9...d5!, with ample counterplay in the center.


Material remains equal, but the White dark-squared bishop now has free rein. Shapiro wisely avoids exchanges, emerging with domination of the long diagonal and a powerful attack.


On Black's 25...Ba6, the White rook on f1 has nowhere to run, but White is hunting bigger game: 26. Rxe3! Rf5 (Bxf1 27. Qh8+ Kf7 28. Qf6+ Ke8 [Kg8 29. Qg6+ Qg7 30. Qxg7 mate] 29. Rxe6+, winning easily) 27. Qh8+ Kf7 28. Qh7+ (Qxa8 was good enough as well) Ke8 29. Qxf5.

In the final position, Black's last-gasp hope, 32...Qd1, is refuted by 33. Qxc6+ Kb8 34. Qc7 mate. Rest in peace, Oscar.

The Orange Bowl didn't go so well, but the juggernaut chess team from the University of Maryland Baltimore County is back on top, having won its fifth Pan-Am intercollegiate team title last weekend in Providence, R.I. UMBC and archrival University of Texas at Dallas, last year's winner, tied once again on match points, with UMBC taking the title on tie-breaks.

GM Alex Wojtkiewicz, alternate Joey Gasis and faculty adviser Alan Sherman took home board prizes in the 26-team competition. Rounding out the champion UMBC A team roster: IM Eugene Perelsteyn, FM William Morrison

and masters Bryan Smith and Yevgeniy Gershov.

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Finally, the 2001 Eastern Open (usually our lead item in the New Year's column) was won by GM Leonid Yudasin and FM Daniel Fernandez, with a 61/2-11/2 result in the 39-player Open section.

Class winners included: Under 2200 - Robert Fischer, 61/2-11/2; Under 1900 - Robert Walker, 7-1; Under 1600 - Kebadu Belachew, 71/2-1/2; and Under 1300 - Johnny Parra and Allen Parrish 61/2-11/2.

Yudasin's win over rising teenage star Hikaru Nakamura in the penultimate round was a grandmasterly affair. Applying pressure on both sides of the board with the center firmly closed, Yudasin manages to force all the action to take place in front of his opponent's king, finally breaking through with a forceful combination.

In a Closed Sicilian, White collects a positional trump on 21. Be3 b4?! 22. axb4 Nxb4 23. Nxb4 Bxb4. The White b-pawn and the Black a-pawn are equally weak, but a swap of the two will only leave the shaky Black king even more exposed.

White gains more ground on 28. Nc2 Be7 (the dark-squared bishop is needed for kingside defense against the White queen) 29. Na3 Bc6 30. Qg4! Bf8 31. Qf4 f5 32. exf6, opening up the h2-b8 diagonal for the White bishop and queen.

With 36. Rxa5 Bxb3, the two weak pawns fall, but now the open a-file and the two White bishops are decisive: 37. Nd3 Ne4 (see diagram; Black is trying to add another defender to the c5-square, but it's already too late) 38. Nc5! (threatening both the rook on b3 and 39. Nd7+) Bxc5 39. dx5 Qc7 (the pawn is immune: 39...Nxc5?? 40. Bf4+ is a crush) 40. c6!.

This time the c-pawn can't be ignored, but its capture costs Black an exchange after 40...Bxc6 41. Ba7+ Kb7 (Ka8 42. Bb6+) 42. Ba6+ Kxa7 43. Bxc8+ Kb8 44. Bxe6, and White has a decisive material advantage.

Yudasin's 48. Qh3- Qe6 49. Qc3! is the cleanest kill, denying Black any drawing opportunities in a rook-vs.-bishop ending. On 52. Rc1 Kd8, White avoids 53. Rxc6?? Re1+ 54. Qxe1 Qxe1+ with a draw. Instead, it's lights out after 53. Qb6+, when 53...Ke8 54. Qxc6+ Kf8 55. Ra8+ Kf7 56. Qg8+ Ke7 57. Re8+ Kd7 58. Qc6 is mate. Nakamura resigned.

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Illustration, Yudasin-Nakamura - After 37... Ne4; Charts, A) District City Championship, Washington D.C., 1949; B) 2001 Eastern Open, Washington D.C., December 2001

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