

## Lewisville I.S.D. Scholastic Chess: A Progress Report

by Michael Bowden

A random sprinkling of disjointed chess ventures was the definition of Lewisville I.S.D.'s scholastic chess program as of May 2006. Quite a difference from May 2008.

The inception of organized chess in the district began in a manner very similar to other efforts. A teacher began playing chess with a student, other students asked to participate and requests came from others for chess lessons. Shortly thereafter the teacher, Mike Bowden, a fifth grade ESL instructor, was asked by his class if they could form a chess club.

"I knew that other campuses were doing something with chess. The school board president organizes an annual tournament in January each year. I contacted campuses whose students had won awards to ask about their program. I was rather surprised."

What Mr. Bowden found was no program at all. "Each campus had a different approach. They certainly don't do that with math or science instruction." Bowden took matters in hand, requesting a section on the district's intranet site devoted to chess. "The goal with the intranet site was to facilitate communication among chess sponsors on campuses without having to meet at a specified time and date" said Bowden. The chess site also provided campus sponsors a resource for chess information. Several links offer guidance and reduce search time. Site members can recommend informative links, post and respond to questions, and organize friendly chess matches between campuses.

Bowden then took a bold step, influenced by his previous work in advertising account service. He contacted the principal at every campus in the district to promote the use of the site and identify the chess sponsor.

During the summer of 2006 the district offered chess in a summer enrichment program that followed summer school classes. "I see some of those students at the annual district tournament; they still talk about the time I taught them chess during the summer" Bowden recalls.

"Frustration defined the beginning of the 2006-2007 academic year; there was very little traffic on the chess site. I continued to talk to people involved in scholastic chess outside the district to seek advice." One of those calls was to the Kasparov Chess Foundation. "They were extremely helpful, very approachable," states Bowden. The conversation resulted in an opportunity to bring the Kasparov Foundation to Lewisville for a staff development. "By the end of the school year I had the okay to put this together, with no budget" Bowden adds.

Realizing this was a premier opportunity to demonstrate the value of a district supported chess program, Bowden set out to ensure such an event. He asked two local chess experts to attend. Jim Stallings, UT Dallas Chess Program Director, and Dr. Alexey Root, former U.S. Women's Chess Champion and author, whose books demonstrate the connection between chess and state curriculum standards, agreed to be part of the program. Stallings made introductory remarks and Root demonstrated a lesson. Jerry Nash, Scholastic Chess Director of the U. S. Chess Federation, made closing remarks.

Two thirds of the district campuses sent a representative; twenty-four of the thirty-eight elementary schools participated. The event also had guests from the state board of education and directors of a scholastic chess program in Monterrey, Mexico.

Several milestone events for academic chess occurred during the school year. David Spence, of Ethridge Elementary in the Colony, hosted several friendly chess matches in which three or more campuses competed during the academic year. In addition, Lisa Harper at Central Elementary hosted an event attended by three schools. A cadre of sponsors formed, meeting on a monthly basis. The group, under the guidance of district grant writer Dr. Charles Fruge, developed a mission statement and chose a name. The objective is to enable the group to seek and obtain grant funds for future projects and initiatives. LISD CHESS - Chess Helping Educate Students for Success.

A proposal was made to district administrators to give campus principals the option to add a section of academic chess to the fine arts rotation. The district superintendent, associate superintendents and principals discussed the merits of such a program in a recent meeting. While there will not be an option available in the upcoming 2008-2009 academic year due to budget concerns, the value of such a program was recognized.

"We do not have a chess program in the district on any level except as a volunteer activity by dedicated teachers who want to provide students an alternative means to develop abilities that will benefit them in many ways as they continue to learn," stated Bowden. "However, we are many steps further than we were three years ago."

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