

The Pan-Am: Organizer's Report

I must confess that I embarked on the journey of organizing the 1999 Pan-Am solely based on simple (perhaps idealistic) enthusiasm. Having participated in the past three Pan-Ams as a member of the University of Toronto chess team, I thought it would be a wonderful idea to showcase our own city to chess-players from all over the Western Hemisphere. In addition, with the University of Toronto's rich chess tradition, I felt it would only be fitting if we had a chance to organize the last Pan-Am of the 1990s. Realizing that my experience at organizing large chess events was nonexistent, I was fortunate to recruit Bryan Lamb (a fellow U of T student with expert-level running club and tournament activities) as a co-organizer. And the rest, as they say, is history.

After merely being a player for my entire chess career, I found that life on the other side of the table (as an organizer) can be hectic, tiring, but very rewarding. Our event in Toronto had many positives — most notably our hard-working organizing and tournament directing group. Led by our supervisor Linda Offman, the entire staff at Hart House helped us tremendously in all the pre-tournament matters, such as organizing our financial accounts, designing our logo, printing flyers, and obtaining supplies. Equally as important, our on-site TDs and volunteers really worked well as a team. Ernie and Joan Schlich of the USCF generously donated their time to come up and help us with the intercollegiate section, and worked tirelessly for four full days — always with a smile, never with a complaint.

Local TDs Ignac Vucko and Bill Evans did an excellent job of organizing the large Open and Scholastic tournaments,

with the invaluable help of Erik Malmsten. Special thanks are due to Tim Redman of the University of Texas at Dallas for two reasons. Mr. Redman graciously agreed to step in as chief FIDE International Arbiter after our original arbiter became ill, and was also instrumental in

the standard of intercollegiate play greatly; this should encourage other schools to participate, in order to gain experience and improve their own teams. I was especially pleased to see some new universities, such as the University of California at Berkeley, the College of William and Mary, and many Ontario and Quebec universities. Of course, hosting the Pan-Am in Canada played a big role in encouraging Canadian schools to take part, thereby adding an extra international flavor to the event.



UTD Dean Michael Coleman (L.) and T.D. Tim Redman relax before the awards ceremony. Dean Coleman traveled to Toronto to present a four-year scholarship to Stephen Glinert, winner of the Pan-Am Scholastic.

photo by Ernst Schlich

arranging the full four-year tuition and fees scholarship to LTD, which was awarded as the first prize in the Scholastic tournament.

We are also indebted to Dean Michael Coleman of UTD, who took time out of his busy schedule to fly up to Toronto and personally present the Scholastic award.

The turnout for the 1999 Pan-Am (335 total players) was fantastic. With 31 university teams from the U.S., Canada, and Peru taking part, I hope this represents the beginning of an upward trend in Pan-Am intercollegiate participation after a few years of decline. The powerful chess programs at UMBC and UTD have raised

IN THE FUTURE

I strongly recommend that future Pan-Am organizers maintain some of the successful ideas we introduced at this event, such as the 40/2 SD/1 time controls, and the use of FIDE rules (to encourage more international competitors to take part). I also believe that in order to help future Pan-Am tournaments, organizers should carefully consider the site for their event. In our case, we were able to get a great downtown location in our large, multicultural city, which allowed players many dining and entertainment options in between their games.

We were pleasantly surprised by the strength of our Scholastic tournament, with 62 players coming from as far away as New York City, Pennsylvania, and Ottawa. I want to express my personal congratulations to local FM Stephen Glinert for winning the big scholarship prize; Stephen, a rising star in the local and national chess scenes over the 1990s, is certainly a deserving recipient of the award. I wish him success in his academic and chess endeavors.

Chris Chu and Bryan Lamb were co-organizers of the 1999 Pan Am. Both are students at the University of Toronto.

Finally, our Open tournament was well attended, with 137 total participants. As Canada's largest city, Toronto is naturally one of the country's foremost chess centers, and therefore we were expecting this to be an exceptionally large Pan-Am Open. The strength of the open section was shown by the 10 FIDE-titled players taking part, which leads me to a "moral of the story" — guarantee the prize fund, and people will come!

Media coverage of the event was also a highlight, with pictures and articles appearing in the *Toronto Star* and *Nation Post* (two of Canada's largest newspapers), Canadian Press, CTV (a prominent national Canadian network) and 580-News (Toronto's largest news radio station) carried stories on the event, and several smaller community papers provided coverage.

LESSONS

Of course, as any organizer knows, no

event is perfect. In particular, during the preparation for the event, one thing I found particularly frustrating was the extent of chess politics in Canada. Political issues weighed on many major decisions, such as book and equipment selling rights to the event, who to use as volunteers, and so on. Once the event got underway, the actual running of the tournament went smoothly on the whole. However, a flood of last-minute entries delayed the start of the first round. Remarkably, over half the Scholastic and Open players registered on site: in hindsight, it certainly would have been a good idea to use more than one computer for data entry prior to the first round.

To further complicate matters, our laptop computer with the Scholastic and Open results and standings was stolen on the third day of the tournament. This resulted in some of the last round pairings having to be done by hand, with all

the previous rounds having to be painstakingly reconstructed on a second computer. Again, the moral of the story — always back up computer data!

In summary, being able to organize the 1999 Pan-Am was definitely a memorable experience. During the tournament, Bryan and I were cheered by comments from local chessplayers stating that the Pan-Am event was the best Toronto tournament they could remember in a long time. As for our visitors from out of the country, I hope that they enjoyed their stay in Toronto, and will consider coming up to Canada for other chess tournaments. Since no bid has yet been entered for the 2000 Pan-Am, I would like to encourage any enthusiastic chessplaying college students to consider organizing and hosting the Pan-Am. Having the chance to bring people from all over two continents to your home city is a thrill that certainly makes up for the long months of planning and preparation. ♣