

CHESS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

The second time the University of Texas at Dallas sent a team to the Pan American Intercollegiate Chess Championships (Bowling Green, KY, 1967) it came in second. That was the outcome of a program that had been conceived years earlier and had gained the enthusiastic support of the university administration from President Franz Jenifer on down.

My interest here is not self-congratulatory, but to offer an outline of how faculty and students at other universities can develop their own chess programs. The key factor in developing chess on campus is understanding how chess can help your college achieve its educational goals and how your college can help you achieve your chess goals.

Synergistic thinking makes for a successful college chess program. Synergy Drive is one of the boundaries of the University of Texas at Dallas which began as a private research institution founded by visionary executives of Texas Instruments. LTD started as a graduate institution, adding upper-division students in 1975, and lower-division students only in 1980. As a comparative young institution, LTD was relatively unknown outside of the world of science and engineering. The Texas legislature required it to have the highest entrance requirements of any public university in Texas, and LTD had difficulty at first finding first-year students who could meet these high standards. LTD was also hard pressed to attract talented in-state students from Dallas, situated as it is in the Telecommunications Center of suburban Richardson north of Dallas.

When Dennis Kratz became Undergraduate Dean in the Fall of 1984, I approached him with the idea of offering academic excellence scholarships that took chess ability into account. I argued that such a program would offer four benefits to the university. First, chess enjoys considerable prestige as a sport. Chess renown would come to synthesize the competitive, intellectual excellence that is the hallmark of the University of Texas at Dallas. Second, for a comparatively modest investment, we could build a winning chess team that

would attract national, regional, and local media attention. Third, many high school chessplayers around the country excel in academic pursuits and could be expected to meet or exceed our en-



Mike Coleman, Undergraduate Dean at LTD, gives Elaine Weatherall her scholarship letter. John Jacobs, DACIS President, applauds.

trace requirements. The university would benefit by recruiting them, and they would find that the university offered an ideal environment to simultaneously pursue their studies and their hobby. Fourth, children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are frequently among the strongest young chessplayers in the country. By offering a chess program, we could hope to reach more students from inner-city Dallas.

Dennis Kratz and I took the idea to Provost Hobson Wilentz and, after further discussion and the approval of the President, we decided to offer academic excellence scholarships taking chess into account, to start in the Fall of 1986. Of course, energetic student chess players didn't wait for university faculty and administrators to act. Hean Khayets and Sam Craft started a chess club at LTD in the Fall of 1985.

The Provost added some ideas of his own, suggesting the possibility of an international academic conference on chess and education, and a chess camp at LTD, both new in the planning stages. But the most important advice was the notion that we must not lose sight of our fundamental mission as a university, to educate productive citizens. Our goal at LTD was not to produce better chess players, but to recruit chessplayers and thus produce better engineers, scientists, teachers, and entrepreneurs.

We awarded our first chess-related academic scholarships for the academic

year that started in the fall of 1986. A brief profile of three of those students will give some indication of the range of abilities and interests we are looking for in our chessplayers. **Nouredine Ziame** was a 2300 player with a

chess scholarship at Shimer College near Chicago when he applied to our program. A native of Morocco, Nouredine had established an excellent reputation as a teacher in the Warren Scholastic Program in Illinois, winning the prestigious Billy Celas Award. He easily met our entrance requirements, but his outstanding chess credentials also put him in the running for a Presidential Scholarship. Nouredine brought an odd bonus to LTD, his spouse Kate Stone, who, as a week-study student assigned to the chess program, has taken charge of recruiting chessplayers for LTD. Nouredine has also worked effectively himself to recruit top-level players.

Jacob Gurwitz was a 2500 player with outstanding academic credentials who had been offered a scholarship at the University of California at Berkeley. On academic grounds alone, he qualified for a Presidential scholarship, and he came to LTD because of the chess program. He has become a campus leader and an influential member of the Student Senate. **Marvin Huchaby** was a highly tactical 2150 player from Skyline High School in Dallas, whose good grades and stellar reputation within the Dallas chess community earned him a Academic Distinction Scholarship, which was upgraded to a Presidential Scholarship after he arrived because of his outstanding schoolwork and commitment to the chess team. As can be seen, these scholarships are not based purely on chess rating (and in this regard we differ from another outstanding college chess program) but are based on academic merit while at the same time factoring in chess ability.

DALLAS AREA CHESS IN SCHOOLS (DACIS)

The Dallas Area Chess in Schools Program began five years ago as a subsidiary of the renowned Chess in the Schools Foundation of New York. Texas FIDE Master John Jacobs volunteered his efforts as coordinator for the Dallas program. Receiving most of its funding from the New York body, the Dallas Chess in Schools project used volunteers and paid tutors to teach chess to

innately Dallas elementary students.

When CAS decided to focus its efforts on New York City alone, DACIS had to strike out on its own. Under the leadership of DACIS President John Jacobs (Vice-President for Economic Development) at the Richardson Chamber of Commerce, the Dallas group formed a 30-to-33 corporation. Its board members are Julia Salinas (a prominent Dallas organizer and electrical engineer), Vice-President Rodney Thomas (a volunteer chess tutor and executive at IBM), Treasurer Jim Stallings (a player and Vice-President of Resource Spectrum, a Dallas recruiting firm), Secretary Alice Wierhoff (an executive at J.C. Penney's), Frank St. Claire (an attorney with Stasberger & Price, a prominent Dallas law firm), and myself, Professor of Literary Studies at UTD.

DACIS is still in the process of establishing a donor base and soliciting corporate grants. But we were able to continue the program last school year (1997-1998) with the help of the University of Texas at Dallas. The help from UTD came as a result of creative thinking on the part of the Provost.

Norredine Zane had spoken to two strong (2300) Indiana masters, James Dean and Jason Boss, about coming to UTD. The problem was that both had concentrated their efforts on chess, not scholastic work. During their high school years, and they didn't meet our minimum academic standards for scholarships. I wanted them for the team and argued that their chess abilities demonstrated that they could do college work. The Provost knew that UTD President Frank Jenney wanted to increase our outreach efforts in Dallas. So he suggested (another example of synergistic thinking) that we offer the two players chess teaching assistantships (something new at UTD): they would receive the minimum scholarship (\$1,300 per year) to qualify them for in-state tuition fees, and \$4,000 a year to teach nine hours a week in the DACIS Program, with a promised upgrade to Presidential Scholarship if they achieved a 3.0 average. This solution allowed DACIS a year to form its corporate board, write its bylaws, and achieve its 501(c)(3) status, while at the same time it greatly strengthened the UTD team allowing the second place result in the Pat Am (up from third the year before).

CHESS COMPETITION SCHOLARSHIPS

Mike Coleman became the new Undergraduate Dean in Fall of 1997 when Dennis Kratz accepted the position of Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities at UTD, and he was quick to put his own

stamp on the chess program. Mike suggested that we truly focus on the university intellectual competitions.

Chess remains the star program, but UTD has also developed teams with national standing in the areas of debate, College Bowl, and Odyssey of the Mind. He designed a "Mind Games" sweatshirt and received approval from the President for a separate budget devoted to all four areas. My observation (corrected, I believe, from Beatriz Martiniello) that "the high tech workforce of the 21st century will be made up of chess players, not football players" helped sharpen the focus, using high-concept rhetoric to further differentiate UTD from our competitors at Rice, UT-Austin, and Texas A&M.

Dean Coleman also introduced the idea of awarding UTD chess scholarships at local, state, and national competitions. Katie Stone awarded the first two such scholarships, valued at \$3,000 per year (the annual current price of tuition and general fees at UTD) for four years to the co-champions of the Texas High School

Tournament last March in Austin, **David John** and **Justin**

Shih. These awards come with only one condition: the winners must meet our entrance requirements at the



The University of Texas at Dallas plans to award four-year tuition and fees scholarships to the top eleventh grader at the Decker Tournament of High School Champions, to the top twelfth grader at the Texas Grace Scholastic Championship (this November), to the winner of the Scholastic Championship held in conjunction with the Pan-American Intercollegiate Championship this December in Dallas, and again to the Texas High School Champion and the DACIS winner next Spring.

Of all of these awards, the latter gives me the most satisfaction. Some 140 sixth grader in the DACIS program, through her or his chess ability, will have college paid for — if they keep their grades up. We believe that this incentive will act as strong motivation for the DACIS students to excel at chess and keep their focus on academic excellence. Mike's efforts have been greatly enhanced by the staff in the Undergraduate Studies Office: Lana Sooster, Mike Leah, Theronia Ramirez, and Betty Ruth (the chess team is known as "Betty's Boys") have all worked hard to make these programs succeed.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Nothing is forever. Universities nationwide are hard pressed for funds. Enlightened administrators, people like President Frank Jenney (who keeps a database of Bobby Fischer games on his laptop for recreation after a hard day), Provost Holman (who, that, or Dean Mike Coleman and Dennis Kratz, are increasingly hard to find), but chess can help some universities face the problems of the next millennium if it is presented in a way that addresses university needs and concerns.

The chess program at UTD attracted the local, regional, and national media coverage that I predicted. It captured the imagination of the press. *The Dallas Morning News* in particular. It has also captured the imagination of UTD's development office. Janene Connelly has over the past year, tracked and brought to the attention of DACIS sponsorship opportunities and grants that are available for programs that focus on the most significant development in U.S. chess since Fischer: chess as a promoter of social good. UTD (with the Dallas Chess Club) will sponsor the Pan American Intercollegiate, December 25-28, 1998. And, with the New York Chess in the Schools Foundation, it will host and co-sponsor an international conference on Chess and Education, the Kofmanovsk, 2000 Conference (see a future issue of *Chess Life* for details). ♣

line of participation and keep their grades up during their four years, recognizing the UTD commitment that we are a university first. A scholarship automatically qualifies a student for in-state tuition and fees.

In April, Dean Coleman awarded another four-year scholarship to the winner of the annual DACIS tournament, **Elaine Weatherall**, a sixth-grader at Arthur Kramer Elementary School. She was unhappy at first, "Does this mean I won't get a trophy?" she asked.