Campus chess team plays games at park grand opening

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Grandmaster Cristian Chirila smiled as he maneuvered his queen to block his opponent’s king. The look of surprise on the opponent’s face was nothing Chirila wasn’t used to, and he shook the man’s hand good-naturedly.

“Checkmate,” Chirila, an international political economy junior, said. “Good game, sir.”

As part of the grand opening of the Klyde Warren Park in Dallas, chess Grandmasters Julio Sadorra, Conrad Holt and Chirila played against park visitors on Oct. 27. Director James Stalling accompanied the players.

“They’re going to be playing a lot of people at once,” Stalling said at the park, where various tables had been set up with chessboards. “These guys are trained, so they have to give these folks a little time to think.”

The invitation to the park’s opening was both important and symbolic for the chess program, according to Sadorra, a business administration senior. He said for him it was both a humbling and gratifying experience.

“We had a great time playing with people and engaging them,” Sadorra said. “We all look turns giving simultaneous exhibitions. It was fun, and I think it was great for the chess program. It symbolizes our partnership with the community and the Dallas area.”

This opportunity has given the UTD chess team a chance to be recognized in the community. Sadorra was excited about seeing prospective chess players in the park in the near future.

“Fortunately because we’re helping to create an intellectual atmosphere in the community,” he said.

The UTD chess program has had multiple wins in the National Collegiate Chess League, the Texas Collegiate Championship and the Final Four of Chess since its establishment in 1996. The team tied for first in the Transatlantic Cup in 2012 and won Division I and II titles in the Pan-American Intercollegiate.

Of the 24 players in the program, four have been titled Grandmasters and four

International Masters by the World Chess Organization. Apart from Sadorra and Chirila, the two other Grandmasters are Holt, a physics junior and Valentin Yotov, an ATEC sophomore are.

The players dedicate themselves to working hard in order to achieve such high statuses, said International Master Rade Milovanovic, co-champion of the 2008 US Open Championship and coach of the chess team since 2001.

Team receives recognition, preps for upcoming season
"We’re very competitive because to reach master status you need to train for at least 10 years," Milovanovic said. "At least. So they learn to be competitive from an early age."

This year, the players will go up against a stronger team in the Pan-American Intercollegiate in December. They will need to make strategic moves so that they can maintain their track record, Milovanovic said.

"It will be our most challenging year because the opposing team has eight Grandmasters, so this is definitely the most difficult season," he said.

The team will participate in a series of tournaments beginning Nov. 2, kicking off the season with a match with the University of Belgrade. They will attend the Texas Collegiate in Houston on Nov. 10 and host UTD’s GM Invitational on Nov. 17.

The team’s final showdown will be the Pan-American Intercollegiate in Princeton, N.J.