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CHESS

Florida Boy, Just 13, Sprints to International Master Title

By DYLAN LOEB McClain Published: December 16, 2007

Last weekend, 1,300 children competed in the grade nationals in Houston, including more than 100 eighth graders. Four — Darwin Li, Andrew Ng, Ben Gershenov and Chaz Daly — tied for first. However, the country's best 13-year-old, Ray Robson of Florida, was elsewhere in the state, competing in an invitational tournament at the University of Texas-Dallas that ended Friday.



Table with chess notation: White Robson, Black Pan'than, White Robson, Black Pan'than. Moves listed from 1 e4 e5 to 24 Bb4 Rb8.

Ray, who started with four victories against two grandmasters and two international masters, did not win the tournament (he finished fourth), but his performance was good enough to complete the requirements for the international master title.

In addition to being perhaps the youngest international master in United States history, Ray satisfied the requirements in a mere six weeks. In November, he won the Sixth North American FIDE Invitational, then finished seventh at the World Youth Championships in Turkey.

Ray studied with Gregory Kaidanov for almost two years, but has been working on his own since June, said his father, Gary, who said he taught his son to play when he was 3.

In a telephone interview on Thursday, Ray, an only child who is home-schooled, said he had no specific plan when it came to studying chess. "I just do different things," he said. "Sometimes it is difficult to figure out what to study."

Asked what he liked best about chess, he replied, "I guess I like it because it is kind of a logic game, and I am pretty good at logic."

Ray said his strength is his tactical ability, which helped him beat Magesh Panchanathan, a 24-year-old grandmaster who attended the University of Texas-Dallas and won this tournament in 2005, in Round 2. But he also displayed patience, outmaneuvering Panchanathan in the Ruy Lopez.

The opening is so well analyzed that the players followed known paths for more than 20 moves. After 23 Bd2, White had completed his development and enjoyed a space advantage in the center, and Black had a knight awkwardly placed on a5.

Panchanathan's 24 ... Rb8 was not the best, as it misplaced the rook. Better would have been 24 ... Nc5.

Panchanathan erred with 27 ... Bd7, and Ray alertly won a pawn with 28 Ne5 de 29 Ba5 because 29 ... Qa5 loses to 30 Qe5.

Ray built up his position gradually and then struck again with 36 Rd7, the point being that 36 ... Rd7 loses to 37 Rc6 Nf6 38 Ne5 gh 39 Bf1 Kh7 40 Rf6.

After 47 Re6, with White on the verge of winning a third pawn with an overwhelming position, Panchanathan gave up.

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