

A chess game of chat and mouse

Videoconferencing bridges miles between Serbian, UTD teams

08:54 AM CDT on Sunday, October 22, 2006

By JENICE JOHNSON / The Dallas Morning News

With an IP address, audiovisual equipment and crossed fingers, the University of Texas at Dallas chess team stepped up to a challenge.

Instead of sitting across the table, its opponent – the University of Belgrade – sat across the world. It was a home match for both teams as the school from Serbia took on UTD's 16-member squad Friday.

"It's videoconferencing just like the telephone, but we are communicating with audiovisual and using Internet access and hardware," said senior audiovisual specialist Nancy Hong, who handled the connections from the Davidson Auditorium of the UTD School of Management in Richardson.

The 200-year-old University of Belgrade, known for its chess team, invited UTD to help initiate the Transatlantic Cup. Using the Internet Chess Club Web site, the teams had about two hours to battle it out on the boards.

Each school had a pre-match ceremony. For UTD, opening remarks were made by chess program director James Stallings and undergraduate dean J. Michael Coleman.

Vuk Draskovic, Serbia's minister for foreign affairs, cut to the chase in his pre-match comments.

"Americans are strong," he said. "Americans are always Americans."

Schools across the nation and chess enthusiasts around the world were able to watch. Several observers typed commentary on the Internet Chess Club system in the form of whispers (comments the players can't see) and kibitzes (visible comments). Many discussed what moves were best.

One of the first wins for UTD came when Keaton Kiewra defeated Vaso Blesic.

"He beat himself," Mr. Kiewra said. "I kept trying to make good moves, he self-destructed, and I put him away."

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Photos by PICHI CHUANG/DMN
Marko Zivanic of the University of Texas at Dallas challenges a player from the University of Belgrade in Serbia in a live Internet chess game. The UTD team has won several awards, but Belgrade had all the right moves in Friday's Transatlantic Cup.

One of the more popular games was between UTD's Magesh Panchanathan and fellow grandmaster Bojan Vuckovic. Mr. Panchanathan seemed to be behind in the match, but he won with mere seconds left on the clock.

The Transatlantic Cup, however, was won by the University of Belgrade, 8 ½-7 ½.

The match "went down to the very last move of the last game to determine a winner," Mr. Stallings said.

UTD chess team members said they are ready for a rematch.

Fire up the servers.

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