

Chess club comes of age

Championships held to mark 10th anniversary

By Brad Feldman
TAB Staff Writer

Chess is a mentally grueling sport. Those who would challenge that assertion, or that chess is indeed a sport, would do well to observe the countless calories burned during a final championship round at the Framingham Chess Club.

"They've measured the blood pressure on some of the tournament players and they're exerting as much energy as a miler," said Tom Powers, the club's program director.

At first glance, a survey of the American Legion banquet hall during tournament play would seem to contradict Power's assertion. Twenty pairs of players face one another in rapt concentration across green-and-white checked boards. Most stare intently at their



Framingham Chess Club President Dan Seidman faces off against Treasurer Donna Alarie for a friendly game in the club's "skittles" room.

pawns, rooks, kings and queens.

The hum of the air conditioner and the squeak of rubber soles against the linoleum floor are the only audible sounds. The players budge now and then to move a piece,

click the time clock, and make note of the move on their score sheets.

Below table, though, it's another story. Legs twitch rapidly with nervous energy.

The bragging rights at this year's tournament, which ended last week, were as hotly contested as ever with local superstar, Senior Master John Curdo being pressured by Worcester-area player Bob Secino in the standings.

The Framingham Chess Club is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. The club meets in the banquet room of the American Legion hall on Beech Street every Tuesday night. Players start to drift in around 7 p.m. with tournament play beginning at 7:30 p.m. with some members

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staying to play past midnight. Annual membership dues are \$30, which entitle members to reduced entry rate for the weekly tournament events.

The club draws its members from all over MetroWest and is one of largest in New England, with more than 90 members. It is open to anyone with an interest in chess and is run on a volunteer basis.

And while the tournament players take their chess game seriously, the club is about winning prize money.

Upstairs from the main hall is the "skittles" room, where players can socialize, talk chess, play friendly games or have a drink from the American Legion bar.

It's in the skittles room that one overhears the kind of chess jargon that could confuse the uninitiated.

"I find that when I avoid that whole Queen's Gambit thing that my life is definitely sweeter," member John Bardash said as he "kibitzed" with Michael Barry.

"There are people who give it a lot of serious study," Powers said. "There is a basic amount of theory that you need to get to a certain level."

But that doesn't mean newcomers should be scared off. "We're blessed to have the range of players that we do," Powers said, referring to the fact that the club's 90 or so members are evenly spread from the 1100 (novice) level to 2000 (Class A). "Most people will find a dozen or so players within a playable range."

Upcoming special events at the club include a 10th anniversary "simul" by Curdo, an exhibition during which the master will play, and probably beat, several players at once. Curdo gave a simul at the club's opening in 1983.

In June, the club will sponsor a beginner's tournament, for school players and other unrated novices.

The Framingham Chess Club meets every Tuesday at the American Legion, 11 Beech St., Framingham, starting at 7 p.m. Call (508) 788-3641 for more information.