

# Chess

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## mates

### MetroWest Chess Club hones skills of young players

By Jared Lenow  
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The next time you ask a typical 10-year-old to list his sports idols, don't be surprised if Bobby Fisher nudges out Pedro Martinez for the top slot.

Chess has become a popular hobby among Natick kids.

"I take it very seriously, but I have a lot of fun," said 10-year-old Natick resident Sam Rabe, who also plays baseball and basketball. "It's so quiet and relaxing."

At 7:30 p.m. every Tuesday, Rabe and a handful of his friends attend the MetroWest Chess Club's Summer Scholastics Program at the Kennedy Senior Center in Natick. It's a 10-week, under-14 program, that gives 27 young chess fans a chance to hone their skills during the summer months.

"Many of these kids are involved in school-based chess programs, so during the summer they're not involved in any organized program," said Alan Hodge, a tournament director at the chess club. "This is a means of bridging from school year to school year."

The program attracts kids with a wide range of abilities, according to Hodge.

"It goes from kids who have only a few moves under their belt to 8-year-olds who could give an adult a run for his money. Chess is one arena where being an adult confers no advantage."

"There's some real competition at the program," says Rabe, a three-



Chris Hanna and Nathan Kessel are among the youngsters who compete weekly at

year veteran of the sport. "Both my parents play, but they really stink. I beat 'em every time. My mom still calls the knight a horsy."

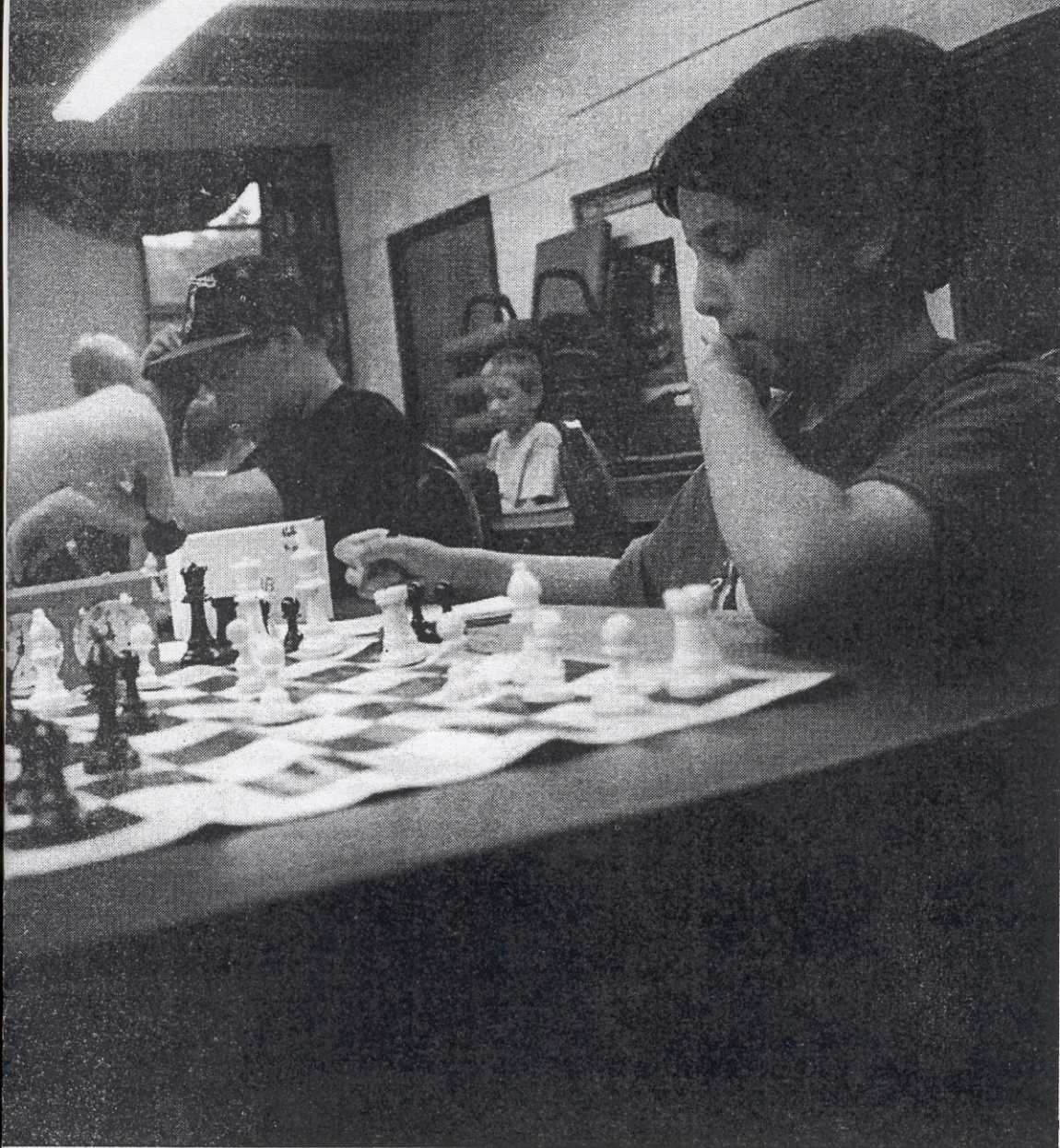
"I wanted to get good, that's why I joined," said Scott Thomas, 10, of Natick, who learned how to play chess from his sister two years ago, but can now "beat her pretty easily."

"He really enjoys it," said Scott's mother, Helen. "He and the other boys look forward to tournaments not only to play and win medals and trophies, but to see the friends

they've made at tournaments who live in towns across the state."

"I particularly enjoy working with the kids," said Hodge. "They bring an enthusiasm to the game that's infectious."

Some kids aren't even allowed to play in the scholastic program because their U.S. Chess Federation rating is too high. Instead, they play in the chess club's monthly tournaments, played in one-round, weekly installments, where they go head-to-head with opponents old enough to be their grandfather in



the MetroWest Chess Club's Tuesday tournaments at the Kennedy Senior Center.

PHOTO BY VIRGINIA CAMPBELL

games that last up to four hours, and win.

The development of the scholastic program, now in its second year, was a natural step for New England's largest weeknight chess club, according to club president Mark Kaprielian.

"What we try to do here is provide people of all age groups with a really great experience. What is great about this club, no matter how old you are, is that it's a place to go, play a challenging game of chess, take it seriously, but most of all have fun."

The chess club, founded in 1983, now has more than 100 members.

Its weekly Tuesday meetings begin at 6:30 p.m. with a study group led by an experienced club member. Each weekly tournament round begins at 7:30 p.m. The average attendance at the monthly tournaments is 55 members, although the biannual larger tournament, which carries a larger purse, attracts about 70 members.

"People come here for the first time and they inevitably find out two things," said Kaprielian, "one, that they're not as good as they thought they were, and two, that if they stick around awhile, they'll learn a lot."

He says the friendly environment

of the club fosters a community environment in which players try to help each other out.

"After most games, one of the players will ask the other 'do you want to go over your game?' and they'll move into the other room, replay the game and discuss it," said Kaprielian. "You learn from your opponent: why what you did is good or not, why your opponent did this in a certain situation. It's a very social thing.

Even though you play four hours in silence, after you go over the game, you've met one friend. After five games, you've made five friends, and so on."