

Presidents Report and notes of the 2014 Annual Meeting

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Table of Contents

I. Purpose.....	1
II. Attendance	1
III. Attendance and its significance to our being at the Natick Community Center.....	2
IV. Attendance versus Space.....	2
V. Why we don't advertise and do a few other commonly suggested things.....	2
VI. Programs	3
VII. What the club needs	4
VIII. Summary	4
IX. Topics raised during the meeting.....	5

I. Purpose

This report provides a brief summary of the topics the current President of the club, Mark Kaprielian, will present and discuss to the membership at the Annual meeting of the club to be held on Tuesday, January 21st, 2014

Due to weather the club could not meet on January 21st. The meeting was instead held on Tuesday January 28th.

The last section of this report includes topics raised during the meeting.

II. Attendance

In 2003 the club saw a significant jump in the level of its annual attendance and has remained at that new level ever since. The average club attendance over those eleven years is 84 players with a several of those years hovering around 88 players and only twice with a year dropping to just below 80 players twice. An observation that I just recently made which didn't reveal itself until the conclusion of 2013 is that our three lowest averaged years occurred immediately after a new record high year.

I've been trying to figure out trends and causes and effects since I first took office in 1995 and I still have not been able to find a repeatable cause and effect for high or low attendance.

We have been running at our current section breaks for over two years. The distribution of players is typically along the lines of the following:

- The occasionally perfectly balanced event has 20 players in each section.
- Usually the middle two sections have more than 20 players while the bottom and top sections have less than 20 players.

Please make a mental note of the following as they may shape your suggestions and thoughts:

- Most of our players are in the middle two sections.
- The USCF shows that the majority of USCF players would fall into our middle sections

III. Attendance and its significance to our being at the Natick Community Center.

2013 saw our first complete year with the downward revised prize structure and the \$5 rise in entry fees. This you may recall was done to offset the fact that our monthly rent doubled from what it had been for many years prior to the new Community Center having been built.

The prize structure and entry fees were adjusted based on the previous several years average attendance and the number of rooms we needed to rent and the pricing of those rooms. Also factored in were estimates for the average number of Masters, TDs, Volunteers, new to USCF and non-members which all have an impact on revenue each month. The result of all this analysis was that our magic numbers are:

- We need at least 76 players to have a shot at breaking even for the month
- We need 80 players to probably have broken even for the month.

IV. Attendance versus Space

The two large rooms accommodate 19 tables which accommodate 2 boards each. This gives us a capacity of 76 players. In the approximate year and a half at our new location we have not yet had a night where we needed to use the skittles room or the downstairs room. We pay rent for both of those rooms and they are factored into the magic numbers for attendance.

2013 was one of the only two years in the last eleven where we had just under an average of 80 players. 2012 was a record year of an average of 89 players. If December of 2012 had not been so poorly attended the average for the year would have been 94 players. With this in mind we needed to ensure we could accommodate more than 80 and up to 104 players on any given night. For this reason we rented the downstairs room which could accommodate 18 boards which is 36 players.

For 2014 we are electing to not rent the extra room downstairs for the following reasons:

- The Community Center would like us to make that room available for other small groups and organizations to meet. They have an increasing demand and would like to be able to accommodate the requests.
- We would like to keep the Community Center happy as they are our landlord.
- To date we have never needed the room. We do run the risk that should attendance rise again to the level of 2012 that we would not have enough space. As an accommodation for our releasing the room the Center promises to keep available as un-rented one-half of the Great Room downstairs. The Great Room has a room divider and separate entrances for each half. Another reason they will not rent this room fully on our night is that it would put a squeeze on parking and they do not want to create parking issues for us. Keep in mind that the parking lot is also used for the gym which they rent on a regular basis.
- The money not spent on the rental of the room will allow us to accumulate some savings instead of striving to break even each month.

V. Why we don't advertise and do a few other commonly suggested things

It is often suggested we advertise to increase the number of players. As you can see we run a constant balance of attendance and capacity. Unlike most clubs that people may have experience with, the MCC has not had an "attendance problem" for the last 17 years. My estimation is that most clubs in the North East consider good attendance to be 20 players at a regular event.

The typical number of players who are members of the club over the course of a year runs from about 120 members to 130. This number of members can be seen on the web page that gets updated monthly on the web site at the link "Who's playing". Most players at the club are members. With 120 members / players per year and an average of 80 players per month, the club runs at close to an optimal level where all the factors are balanced. E.g. capacity, break even, etc.

Other typical suggestions made and short reasons for why they are not done are:

- Shorter time controls
 - This becomes attractive to scholastic players and we would expect a significant increase in young players. This creates a problem with capacity. It also changes the “feel” of the club from both a participant’s perspective and from a long versus short time control perspective.
 - Analysis of attendance when we had the occasional short time control events revealed very consistent impacts on attendance.
 - Short time control events, even with encouragement to have our members participate, usually ran at half or less than the previous months attendance.
 - The attendance of the regular even following was always lower than before the short time control event and lower than the next month.

Note: When the club first transitioned from having a variety of time controls some members were happy about it, others were not. The choice was made that we would establish a consistent program of long time controls with the hope that over time we would establish a consistent following which would create stability in the club. In my opinion these goals were reached as evidenced by the club today.

- Make the club more attractive to young players.
 - See the comments about shorter time controls
- Induce higher rated players to attend.
 - We already have a very high proportion of the available active higher rated players who play and are within reasonable traveling distance. We are most likely already achieving any of the perceived benefits of having such a collection of players attending. With our long standing policy of Masters play for free, attracting more masters do not help pay the rent and consume more of our capacity.

VI. Programs

A. DGT boards to capture the top boards

This year we purchased three new DGT boards. The funds for the boards and clocks were primarily provided by long time club member Walter Champion. Rolf Wetzel also made contributions for the purchase of clocks for the existing boards and to offset other costs.

We had long considered expanding the program with additional boards but the primary problem was that we had no place to store even the current boards on site. A few months ago after a very long process we were able to obtain storage and at no additional cost.

B. DGT boards live to the internet

After an initial test run earlier in the year the Community Center made an adjustment to their network for us that allows us to transmit the games live from the board to our site.

C. Weekly Group Class

We have seen a drop off of classes due to no longer having a volunteer in place to drive the program.

D. Online Registration

This year we found a “workable for us” method of providing On-line registration. It’s had some initial issues but we believe we have a working system. This year we hope to see a greater adoption of players registering online. Online registration allows us to reduce crowding and delays for the first night of play.

VII. What the club needs

What the club needs is what we and most any club always need, more volunteers. Below is a list of our most immediate needs in order of greatest to least need in my opinion.

A. **DGT Program Director**

Currently the management of the DGT boards has fallen upon the TD staff. This is not a sustainable situation. We need someone to take over the management of the DGT program. The tasks of this volunteer would be as follows:

- Oversee and as needed perform the set up and take down of the DGT boards, clocks and computer.
- Manage a collection of volunteers to perform either set up, take down or possibly both

B. **Group Class Director**

The Group Class will typically thrive when we have a director in place to co-ordinate and solicit instructors. Club practice is that we do not pay for instructors. All our instructors volunteer their time and effort. We have a list of people that we can call upon and the number of times they will avail themselves vary. With someone in this role I believe we could expect to see at least two classes a month.

C. **TDs (Tournament Directors)**

The core of the club's activity revolves around the monthly rated event. No TD's, no rated chess. Each and every week there must be a TD on hand from the start of the first game to the end of the last game. If TD's are no longer playing they generally are also not available to TD. People get busy and are not always able to play chess and this includes the TD.

The club has a training program for TDs. We have divided TD responsibilities into two "shifts" to allow people who can't be present at either the start of the night or the end of the night to still contribute as a TD.

D. **News Letter Editor**

The goal of publishing a monthly or quarterly newsletter is to enhance the sense of community among our players and provide a history of the activities and accomplishments of the club.

E. **Short Term technology projects**

At any given time there are usually several technology related projects that we are either experimenting with or which we had the skills and or time to attempt. Most of these projects require some programming skills of some type. Skills or project types we are in need are:

- Web site scripting for automated organizing of transmitted games and game replay.
- Android programming for possible custom apps

VIII. Summary

A. **Challenges**

Our biggest challenge is staffing the programs that we want to see flourish along with maintaining our pool of TDs. These roles were detailed in the previous section, namely, DGT Program Director, Group Class Director, Newsletter Editor and Tournament Directors.

B. **Accomplishments**

I feel that there are a number of things we can be proud about with our club:

- We continue to have what I think we can fairly say is consistent and amazing attendance
- We attract and maintain a very strong open section with not just a one or two Masters but often five or more and a supporting cast of Experts.
- We capture and make available the games from the top boards.

- We broadcast the top boards live each week. I haven't learned of any other clubs that do that.
- We have in my opinion, managed to establish and maintain a very friendly club where our members and players enjoy coming together each week to play and learn.

IX. Topics raised during the meeting

A. Suggestion to drop inclusion of December from the Monthly event statistics

It was suggested that due to the December event

- Being reduced down to just two nights
- Having no prizes issued or winners declared
- Games played were submitted for rating only
- The event was essentially cancelled

That it would be appropriate to not include December as part of our statistics for demographics and attendance.

B. Improving the core group of regular players

It was suggested that since our two middle sections which make up the majority of players in each event maps closely to the middle range of players in the USCF, if we focus on retention of our middle section we should be able to better maintain a core attendance and be able to better attract players not already playing at the club.

C. Additional type of communication to reach players

It was suggested that there is a sizable number of players who are likely not reading the newsletter and who may not arrive in time to hear announcements made before the start of the round. To help make these players aware of things such as the need for volunteers, a sign posted by the pairings or elsewhere would likely be noticed and would improve our chances of getting more volunteers.

D. Question - How much would advertising with MACA cost?

Advertising on the Maca site is likely free and in Chess Horizons, the Maca publication, rates are not very expensive, e.g. \$10 for a quarter page, or at least that was the rate several years ago.

E. Question – Do you feel we are losing members due to health and aging

The age of our club members follows the well-known “Fisher bump”. While we have a few older members no longer attending we have a pretty constant supply of younger players playing. My opinion is that we are still years away from seeing a noticeable impact of players aging out due to health.

F. Question – What happened to the discussion of eliminating membership fees.

The general idea was that to simplify registration and eliminate book keeping, entry fees would be adjusted to accommodate the loss of membership fees and everyone would pay the same entry fee. While there are still a few people on the committee that think the idea still has value, the momentum died when we followed all the connections to see their impact. The biggest issue was that if we do not have members then how do we vote as an organization? Where do the officers come from? We then constructed a few ways to resolve this, the best of which was that players who maintained a certain level of participation in events would be classified as members and entitled to vote. This creates a different kind of book keeping. Also, when we rebranded and re-launched the website about ten years ago we did so focusing on the concept of building and maintaining a sense of community among our players. With no clear sense of membership, we feel it becomes more difficult to promote and maintain a sense of community.