



Metrowest Chess Club

President's Report for the Annual Business meeting March 4, 1997.

The Year in Review:

During the 1996-1997 term a number of fundamental changes were instituted by the board of directors including the relocation of the club to the Kennedy Senior Center in Natick. This move facilitated our ability to promote the club and attract new players. As part of our move, we changed the name of the club. To bank on our name recognition in the chess community, we retained a reference to our former name in all our promotional material. Mailings of Newsletters, postcards and flyers resumed as part of our membership and promotional strategy. The largest of these mailings was the first issue of the newsletter, sent out to approximately 900 current or former MACA members. Several mass mailings were done to inform the existing chess community of our existence and activities.

As part of our strategy to strengthen the membership of the club, we focused on three primary areas, namely:

1. Maintaining the current membership base
2. Attracting and keeping strong players
3. Attracting and keeping players new to the USCF

The following adjustments were made to our program of activities to meet the above objectives:

- The open section prize fund was raised to a \$200 minimum for most all regular tournaments. It was hoped that this would prove to be an inducement to Masters to show on a somewhat regular basis. By attracting Masters, we hoped that other Masters would also play as we develop a reputation for being a strong club. In addition, we hoped that those just below the Masters level would be attracted to the club so they could test their skills against the Masters and have a chance to gain some big points should they win.
- Free entry was given to all Masters (over 2200) to all events. This too was done to attract Masters to the club with the idea to eliminate any risk of financial loss to Masters and remove the need to place to make back their entry fees.
- Free tournament entry was given to those joining the USCF for the first time if they also joined the Club. This was to reduce the "sticker" shock of joining everything at once to start playing.
- Each event was designed to give players at various ratings a chance to win a prize. This was done by either having two sections or Class prizes. The Class prize rating breaks were varied to provide incentive to different levels of players; the idea being that most everyone likes to come away with a prize now and then as opposed to taking a beating most of the time and thinking that you don't have a chance of ever winning anything either.
- The rules of tournament chess were explained to those new to organized chess. Pointers for better play were provided if it seemed appropriate. This was designed to get the new people comfortable and reduce their fear. It also gave newcomers a chance to get to know one or more of the club members and become acclimated into the club more rapidly.
- An E-mail distribution system was established to disseminate information. The system included an e-mail list for Board members as well as a general membership list. The general list was established to obtain feedback from the membership, provide a forum for general topics of discussion and to keep chess in our members thoughts by receiving weekly information regarding the activities of the club. The Board list was established to facilitate the communication among board members.
- Publicity flyers aimed specifically at the non-USCF public were distributed and placed in various businesses and libraries to make people aware that there was someplace for them to play and improve their game.

The approach selected has worked fairly well. We have attracted Masters who have returned to play several times, seen a steady influx of players new to the USCF join the club and have had former members return to active play. Overall, club attendees have been voicing positive opinions about the club and the quality of play.

Some hard numbers on membership and attendance are as follows:

- Average Event Attendance: 21 in 1995, 26 in 1996.
- Membership: 55.
- People who have placed at the club in the last 12 months: 73.
- Largest turnout in the last two years: 43 for the Stan Crowe Memorial in November 96.
- Highest number of Masters playing in a single event: 4 at the Stan Crowe Memorial.

Of note for the membership is that the Board of Directors usually does not meet in person. In fact, in the last two years the Board has met only once physically as a group and this was at the beginning of my first term in 1995. The majority of business is conducted by means of email discussion among board members. E-mail has eliminated the difficulties associated with trying to get the entire board together physically to discuss topics and allows all the members of the board to participate in the discussion regardless of current physical availability. To expand the amount of feedback to the Board, opinions are solicited by way of email discussion with the general membership.

While this may appear to discriminate against those without email, it should be noted that out of our 55 members, approximately 40 have e-mail. Prior to the advent of email, no effective timely means of getting a large amount of feedback existed at all for the club as due to the fact that on any given Tuesday night, any number of members may not be present. The use of email has vastly improved the amount of membership input for the direction of the club. Most of our Board members are active players and informal discussions between them and the membership also occur Tuesday nights at the club. This is when I, personally solicit face to face feedback with members.

The Future:

The primary area of concern for the future of the Club that must be addressed is that of voluntary service to the club. Specifically I am referring to the management of the club from week to week. As is often the case with small organizations and as it has been the case with this Club, the majority of the work continues to be carried by a very small number of people. For the last several years it has generally been taken up by two, maybe three people. The pattern that has resulted from this is that those upon whom the burden has been saddled "burn out" and often disappear from Club play entirely. This does not bode well for the survival of the club in the long term.

Summary:

In summary, I would say that the for term of office just concluding, the Club has made significant gains in health and vigor and is essentially doing the right things to make the club strong and a good chess environment. If further support from the general membership can be obtained, the Club should be able to make further achievements. Should we not be able to obtain further assistance from individuals in taking an active part in the management of the Club, it is my belief that we will not progress any further and are headed for decline and instability as those who are carrying the load, burn out, and those who remain are forced to step in or see the club extinguish. Hope should not yet be lost since it will only require a relatively modest amount of effort by a number of people to rescue us from this situation. It is my hope that the club we have today has become important enough and fun enough to the members so that they will want to see it continue and do what they can to lighten the load for all.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Kaprielian

President, March 1996 - March 1997