

Q & A

SUNDAY INTERVIEW

Mark Kaprielian Chess club president

If it's Tuesday, it's checkmate at the MetroWest Chess Club. With 147 members and a weekly attendance of 88 players, President Mark Kaprielian can brag about presiding over the largest chess club in New England.

The group meets at the Natick Senior Center and keeps tabs on all the action thanks to a Web site, www.metrowestchess.org.

Reporter Laura Crimaldi recently dropped by the club to talk with Kaprielian before an evening of chess got under way.

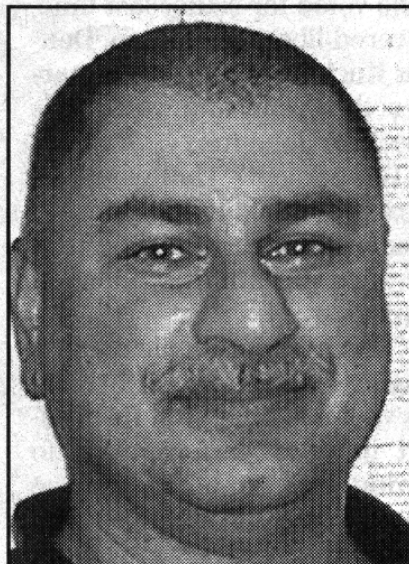
Q: Can you tell me how the Internet has impacted chess clubs?

A: About 10 years ago, the Internet was just starting to pick up in terms of people playing. A lot of people were finding online chess and it was becoming very popular. Our chess federation, the United States Chess Federation, which is the governing body of chess in the United States, had actually run articles (saying) they thought Internet chess could kill club play. I like to brag to the fact that after a year of taking over as president in 1995, what I found was that people were coming in that had been playing on the Internet. I predicted that it would actually help. My prediction came true and the chess federation now thinks the Internet has been great for clubs.

Q: How did the MetroWest

how the knights moved so, she had to help me. She taught me how to do that. We played four games and she had to help me remember how to move the pieces, especially the knights. But I won the first four games we ever played. And my sister never played chess with me again. I started in first grade, which was fairly unusual to start that young.

All through elementary school ... there were only four or five children who played chess. In high school, at Natick High they didn't have a team or anything, but they had a little club. I was one of the best players in the town, but I just couldn't beat this one kid



Mark Kaprielian

who was in all my classes. He al-

Q: How did the Meadowcroft Chess Club get so big?

A: I've always emphasized three things and I believe it's the formula for our success. Like any business, and we're not a business, but if you have a bad location no one's going to go. ... The number two thing I did was I made everything standard - entry fees, prizes, the rules, starting on time. ... I made things exactly the same every week so people know what to expect and they can just show up. And indeed that helped tremendously. People would say to me, 'This is a great run club.' And that's because we started on time week after week after week. ... Consistency in everything was the number two. The third thing was I taught myself how to do Web pages and I put up the Web site. The reason the Web site helped the club grow is not because of advertising, ... It did something else. ... What happens is people want to play chess, but life gets in the way. With chess players you kind of have to build up your stamina. You have to remember things as much as in any other sport. You need both knowledge and you need conditioning. When people have been away a while, they feel rusty. So they have to go into that whole process of getting back into it.

Q: How did you start playing chess?

A: Well, my older sister wanted to learn to play. My dad had gotten her a book. I was just going into first grade. ... She was five years ahead of me so, she was in sixth grade. I didn't remember

ways seemed to play better than me. I also played chess by mail. ... And I'd play in the occasional chess tournaments that came by and I played in college. Through college and my first couple of years of work, I played in two or three tournaments a year. Every time I felt rusty, I'd study up. That brings us up to where I would have to start telling you how the club was started because I am one of the four founding members.

Q: For those who don't play, why don't you tell us what we're missing.

A: Again, I have to speak from a very personal perspective. The challenge of thinking clearly is very much like a sport. A single mistake can make you lose a game. There's a beauty in the combinations and the things that happen on the board that are just really cool. You go, 'Wow.' I'm always amazed I see any of that. It's like wow, this is really cool. But a lot of this is a struggle against yourself. I feel it's much more against yourself than your opponent. If you don't play well, it's much easier for your opponent to defeat you. Kids often blame their opponents, but it's really yourself. It's the beauty and the magic of what happens on the board. And the sense of accomplishment you have when you play that game without mistakes or you make less mistakes than your opponent and you win. Equally rated players have a 50-50 chance of winning.