

In the Shadow of the Arch

By Jim Egerton

St. Louis has always been the gateway for those seeking their fame and fortune by going west. Now the city is leading a revival of one of the oldest competitions known to man. For a fortnight in May, twenty-four of the best American CEO's (Chess-playing Executive Officers) competed against each other to determine a champion. The CEO's implemented their strategies with astute planning and ruthless tactics. They rallied their employees (pieces), evaluated and undertook projects, attacked the competition, defended their enterprises, engineered fortresses and even invested when necessary with timely sacrifices, all in the pursuit of the championship.

These CEO's were internationally titled players, (21 Grandmasters and 3 International Masters) who were selected for this championship based on their recent performances in chess competition. Billed as the 2010 US Chess Championship, this tournament has a long and storied history. It was the launching pad for our only official World Chess Champion, Bobby Fischer, who like Bjorn Borg at Wimbledon owned the tournament winning 8 consecutive times from 1957-67.

In sports the names of Roddick, Mickelson, Kane and Konerko as well as business names like Walton, Kroc, Gerstner and Welch are all better known than the chess names of Shulman, Nakamura, Kamsky and Onischuk. But these chess players have at least one thing in common with their sports and business brethren; they all compete at the highest level of their game trying to become the best. Successful strategies of sport stars and business icons are often related to the ideas chess players use regularly at the board.

The Venue

Golf has Augusta National, tennis has Wimbledon and now chess has the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of St. Louis. When you enter one of these iconic venues you immediately sense the respect for the game. It's manifested in the quality of the playing conditions and epitomizes what the competitors go through while in the arena. Nestled on a quiet avenue that mixes residential and commercial in an upscale neighborhood in western St. Louis, a palace has been built for the public to come, learn and play chess. Those interested and who happen to be in St. Louis, definitely should take the opportunity to visit the club where great things are happening for the game of chess. The vision of Rex Sinquefield the Founder and President of the Chess Club has given playing chess a whole new meaning.

A Typical Storefront?



The two-story complex looks like any other retail building on Maryland Avenue except for the inviting chessboards and tables out front which indicate something is different at this establishment.

The Foyer



Upon entering you are met by a bright and contemporary look of a facility designed for those interested in playing chess.

The Skittles Area



Behind the foyer/entry way is a playing area available for skittles and purchasing merchandise. The flat panel TV shows 6 of the games that are going on during the championship.

The Battlefield I



Up on the 2nd floor is the main arena where things are being readied for the round to begin. The first seven rounds of this tournament are using a Swiss pairing where players who have the same results are paired against each other. This tournament is different because after seven rounds the top four places will be paired into a 4-way round-robin facing each other individually. Like the

Final Four in basketball, everyone is vying to make it to the finals.

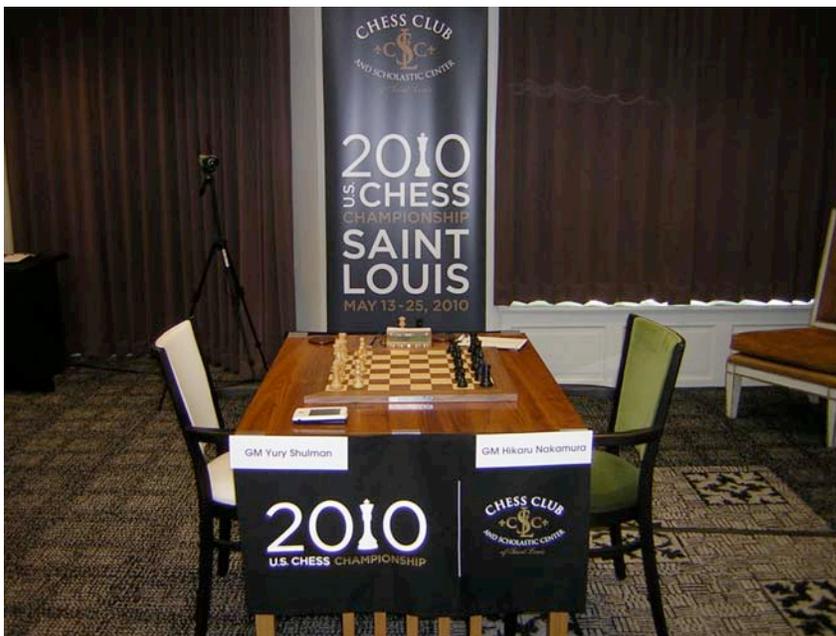
The playing floor is divided into two sections, at the top of the stairs on the left are boards 1-6 and on the right are boards 7-12. All the tables are lined up against the walls with only a few feet separating the spectators from the competitors.

The Battlefield II



Pictures of the players line the walls as we are just minutes away from the start of the next round of the tournament.

Board One Awaits the Competitors



Board #1 is set up at the front of the hall and has its own camera recording the game in progress. It is used to track what is happening from the broadcast area located on the lower level.

The Calm before the Storm



The competitors nervously assemble in the playing area trading small talk and awaiting the Tournament Director to ring a large hand bell which is used to officially start the round.

The Battles Begin



Today the featured match on first board is 2008 US Champion and Illinois resident Yury Shulman playing against 2009 US Champion Hikaru Nakamura.

What is he Thinking?



With the game progressing quietly on the 2nd floor, in the basement of the club a worldwide broadcast was conducted. With the TV camera focused on Board 1, spectators question GM Maurice Ashley and WGM Jennifer Shahade about what is going on.

For a business person's perspective and an annotated description about this exciting encounter, please see www.chess-now.com and download a Pdf version of "*Taking Care of Business at the Board.*"

Post Game Press Conference



After each game, the players came into the press/broadcast area to talk to the commentators and give their impressions of what had just happened. Seeing the winner and loser sitting side by side telling their perspective made for some interesting commentary. Here are Yury and Hikaru giving their feedback on the game.

Making the Final Four and the 2010 Champion



Besides Grandmasters Shulman and Nakamura, the two other grandmasters who made the Final Four are Grandmaster Alexander Onischuk (left) and Grandmaster Gata Kamsky (right). Grandmaster Kamsky who last won a US Championship in 1991 went on to win the event in a tie-break to become the 2010 US Champion.

Illinois' other Grandmaster - Dmitry Gurevich



About to start his round against Grandmaster Vinay Bhat (left) is Chicago resident Grandmaster Dmitry Gurevich (right). By having won the 2009 US Open Championship in Indianapolis he qualified for the 2010 US championship.

Looking Ahead

So what will happen in the shadow of the arch next year? Who knows for sure but the St. Louis Chess Club will again be host to this prestigious event. All of the players had great things to say about the tournament including the organization led by Director Tony Rich and the staff at the club. Many of the players took advantage of extended activities like a Cardinals baseball game and participated in a 'giving back' event to the community by volunteering at a nearby science museum where they taught chess to the patrons. And how were the spectators treated while the games were in progress? Well the following photo answers that question by the mouthful.

The Spectators feast during the Games



Most people have no idea how much preparation goes into playing in such a high level chess event, they just think two players sit down and play some chess. Participants spend weeks getting ready for this competition some studying thousands of chess positions a day. They study the games of the opponents they could meet and review the latest theory of what other Grandmasters are playing

in tournaments around the world. Being a chess professional is a difficult calling and many players write, teach and play the chess tournament circuit on weekends just to make a living.

Next up for the players who made the Final Four at the US Championship is to represent our country in the Chess Olympiad later this year where the USA will defend its 3rd place bronze medal earned in 2008. Doing well at this Olympiad just might get the names of Shulman, Nakamura, Kamsky and Onischuk a step closer to the names Walton or Welch in business and Roddick or Mickelson in sports.