

Front, left to right: Maya McGreen, Mariah McGreen, Kamil
Back, left to right: Markus Pond, Matthew Kluska, Jack



Team of History

The Junior High I.S. 318 are National High School Champions

By **MATAN PRILLELTENSKY**

ELIZABETH'S PROGRAM

EVERY THREE YEARS, THE KIDS ARE completely different. No matter: The result is typically the same. A middle school from Brooklyn's Broadway Triangle brings national championships home from Nashville, Dallas, or Orlando. I.S. 318's coach, WFM Elizabeth Spiegel, admits to not recalling just how many titles it has been. Since 2007, the beginning of the USCF online records, her program has

captured 10 (of a possible 15) grade school national titles. Its sixth graders have won the K-6 national championship three times. Dominance of junior high school nationals has been pronounced, with the K-8 and K-9 championships being taken thrice and twice, respectively. Every title the program was eligible for through 2011, it won at least once. Except for the greatest team prize in American scholastic chess: The K-12 national championship.

In her 13 years running the program,

WFM Spiegel has developed a winning, replicable system. Kids enter the chess program in sixth grade, frequently with little to no competitive experience. Every incoming student in the school takes chess as a required class. Sixth grade periods are structured traditionally: An advanced group and a beginner group swap places partway through, one playing while the other receives instruction. This is the year 318 students decide what role, if any, chess will play in their mid-

Chmielewski, James A. Black, Jr., Brian Arthur, Isaac Barayev, Tommy Zhang, Carlos Tapia Wen, Kevin Marin, Anita Maksimiuk, Justus Williams, Elizabeth Spiegel, John Galvin



dle school experience.

Kids who catch the bug continue with chess as an elective and after school club, possibly seeing GM Miron Sher once a week. Some of these students will take Spiegel's class every day. Their classes become less traditional and more like a teacher-led study group: On a recent Monday, Spiegel taught students playing the Colle-Zukertort opening a 15 minute lesson before they reviewed the material by playing through a ChessBase file. Kids playing the Caro-Kann worked independently, sparring and answering questions she had prepared, before meeting with her to discuss their findings. The three strongest players in the class, all rated over 2100, played blitz in the back of the room, while a group of non-tournament players played Game/20. Differentiated instruction is taken very seriously: In the run-up to nationals,

there were times when no two kids were studying the exact same thing.

Each Saturday, students compete in a Game/30 tournament run by Chess In The Schools. These tournaments take place in public schools around New York City, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Registration is free, and kids have their games analyzed by Spiegel or IM Farai Mandizha, assigned to the team by Chess In The Schools. The analysis is intense, frequently uplifting, occasionally painful. Deep calculation or focused planning receives hard-won praise; lack of basic opening knowledge is criticized. Opening instruction is an essential part of Spiegel's curriculum. "Teach a kid the Colle, even better, the Colle-Zukertort, give them a plan to play for, and they will learn how to make and carry out a plan. They will get the same type of positions and structures, so they will be able to use

their experience from past games and post-mortems to orient themselves in the future." (excerpted from Spiegel's blog at lizzyknowsall.blogspot.com).

The combination of elective chess classes, Saturday tournaments, and the after school club has proven exceptionally fruitful. This model won its successes with class A and B players, kids whose main chess influence was their school-teacher. But the last few years have been slightly different. In 2009, three unusual students were part of the entering sixth grade class: Justus Williams, James Black, and Isaac Barayev. By eighth grade, these three had raised the bar for what their program could accomplish. A glance at the school's rating list tells the story: Each one outrates their expert teacher, Justus and James by hundreds of points. Each has a serious study program outside of school: Justus is a

PHOTO: ADRIANA LOPEZ SANFELIU



World-number one GM Magnus Carlsen payed a visit to the school. Here, he plays blitz with Justus Williams.

long-time student of GM Sher, while James and Isaac study with GM Alexander Stripunsky. Having a large core of A and B players supporting these three made it possible for 318 to dream of an historic coup in Minneapolis.

Winning the high school national championship is an historic achievement that belongs to all 318's players, not just the four top scorers who received plaques. But it was the top four who combined to produce the winning score of 20 points. Their names are Justus Williams, Isaac Barayev, Matthew Kluska, James Black.

JUSTUS

Hailing from the South Bronx, Justus became the youngest black master in U.S. history at the age of 12, smashing the previous record by almost three years. At just 13-years-old, Justus' resume reads like that of an experienced pro. He has represented the United States four times in international competition, and been selected three times as an all-American. He starred on the 2011 U.S. Chess League champion New York Knights, and is featured in the recent documentary, "Brooklyn Castle." National Championships are not lacking: He won the individual K-6 title in 2010 and shared first in the 2011 Barber tournament for elite junior high players. He might not tell you any of this himself: Justus lets his moves communicate his position in the

chess world.

During games, his demeanor is unusual, particularly for a middle schooler. He sits motionless, reaching out only to move a piece, and deliberately retreats his arm back toward his body. Several times in Minneapolis I noticed an opponent shaking his head, tapping his leg, while Justus sat stoic opposite. During one of these games, 318 Assistant Principal John Galvin speculated that "his pulse never goes over 50 beats a minute." While other top players demonstratively react to moves or communicate silently with onlookers, Justus' board manners are perfect. In the junior high school blitz tournament, when an opponent's flag fell, Justus quietly said "time." The TDs didn't hear him.

In Minneapolis, Justus was nicked for a draw in round three by expert Darren Wu, of Washington State. No matter: Surely 6½ would at least tie for first. Early draws in national events were not unusual for Justus, nor were strong recoveries. He won his next two games to reach 4½/5, within striking distance of first place. If he were to beat Arizona master Dipro Chakraborty in round six, he would be playing for the individual national championship in the last round. But it was not to be: Surprised in the opening, Justus later said he had lost the four hour game "pretty much without a fight." With under an hour before the final round, and the individual championship gone, Justus quietly told me he wasn't hungry and was going to play basketball. With

at least one 318 likely scorer to be paired up in the last round, Justus' final game would be a must-win for his team.

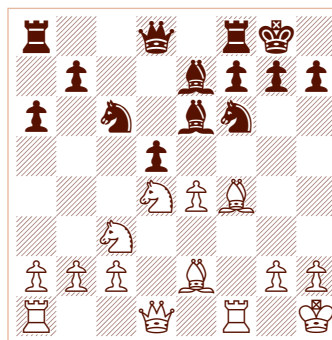
Sicilian Defense, Najdorf Variation (B92)

Jeevan Karamasetty (2190)

Justus Williams (2312)

National High School Championship (5), 04.14.2012

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Be2 e5 7. Nb3 Be7 8. 0-0 0-0 9. Kh1 Be6 10. f4 exf4 11. Bxf4 Nc6 12. Nd4 d5



After 12. ... d5

Not one of the common moves here, but Justus has his own ideas and quickly unbalances the game.

13. Nxe6 fxe6 14. Bg4 dxe4 15. Bxe6+ Kh8 16. Qe1 Bb4! 17. Bb3 Qa5!

Pressuring c3 ...

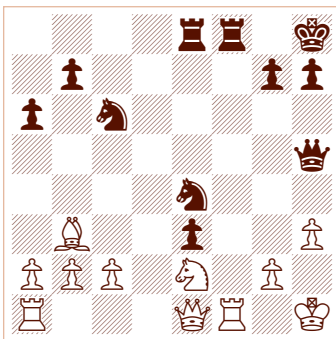
18. Bd2 Qh5!

Or swinging over to the kingside! White has done nothing obviously wrong, yet he is already worse.

19. h3 Rae8 20. Ne2 Bxd2 21. Qxd2 e3 22. Qe1

22. Qd3 is the only way to keep the disadvantage within bounds.

22. ... Ne4



After 22. ... Ne4

And just like that, Black is winning.

23. Kg1 Nf2 24. Ng3 Qh4 25. Nh1 Nd4 26. c3 Nf3+ 27. gxf3 Nxh3+ 28. Kg2 Nf4+ 29. Kg1 Qh3 30. Rf2 exf2+ 31. Qxf2 Ne2+ 32. Qxe2 Rxe2 33. Nf2 Qg3+ 34. Kh1 Rxf2 35. Rg1 Qh2 mate.

This game shows the combination of creativity, fearlessness, and accuracy that makes Justus such a difficult opponent.

JAMES

In sixth grade, it was clear James Black had talent. He quickly developed into a class A player, taking clear first at grade school nationals with 6½/7. Before the year was out, he had crossed 2100, seemingly unstoppable. Another individual title followed the next year: first on tiebreaks in the K-8 Championship, a victory characterized by James' creativity in attack. But to become a 2300+ player, James used the oldest trick in the book: hard work.

The three-time U.S. Champ has an endless appetite for chess information and literature: He collects the Quality Chess *Grandmaster Repertoire* books, seeking to pick up ideas from openings he doesn't play himself. James has studied every world champion independently; his eyes light up when he talks about them. "Smyslov is like, the ultimate classical player" he once explained to me. "No move is over aggressive, no move is passive. Everything makes perfect sense." But his favorite player is part of the new wave; James' voice rises slightly when he talks about Levon Aronian. "I love the way he can just ... sac an Exchange in so many positions!"

I.S. 318 on the Silver Screen



A two-years-younger Justus Williams in a scene from Brooklyn Castle.

Before I.S. 318 became National High School champions, they were filmed for the documentary Brooklyn Castle, which will be reviewed in Chess Life later this year. The information listed below is from the time of filming. See more about the film at brooklyncastle.com. (In the film, Elizabeth Spiegel's name was Vicary.)

Intermediate School 318 in Brooklyn, New York, is housed in a squat concrete building on a dingy inner-city block. The school's exterior offers little to impress but, in room 319, something extraordinary is happening. Over the last decade, hundreds of Ms. Vicary's students have learned to play chess. The school has a powerhouse chess team that has won 26 national chess titles—more than any other junior high school in the country. It's a particularly notable achievement for I.S. 318, a Title I school, where more than 60 percent of students are from homes with incomes well below the federal poverty line.

Brooklyn Castle follows five of the school's chess team members for one year, and documents their challenges and triumphs both on and off the chessboard. Justus is a prodigiously talented 10-year-old trying to navigate the unfamiliar pressures that come with newfound success and adulation. 11-year-old Patrick struggles with ADHD, and uses chess to improve his concentration. Alexis, 12, already views chess as a means to attain a higher education and support his immigrant family. Rochelle—an ambitious 13-year-old—strives to become the first African-American female to reach the level of chess master. And the team's emotional and outspoken leader, 12-year-old Pobo, rallies his fellow students against school budget cuts while running for school president. In each of these young teens, we witness the profound ways that learning and playing the beautiful and complex game of chess has imbued the lives of these equally beautiful and complex students at an underfunded urban public school.

This year, I.S. 318's chess team is the strongest in school history. But as the New York City public school system continues to reel from state and city-wide financial crises, I.S. 318's budget has been cut by more than \$1 million. After school programs like chess are often frontline budgetary casualties, despite their proven success in improving students' development in ways often unattainable in the classroom, especially in high-needs areas.

Coaches John Galvin and Elizabeth Vicary deeply believe that their students have benefitted from playing chess, and they are committed to keeping their program intact and alive. For Justus, Patrick, Alexis, Pobo and Rochelle, chess is more than just a game. It is a theatre of hard work and determination where they negotiate larger conflicts by maneuvering their armies of rooks, knights, pawns, and bishops—and where they can become kings and queens, far beyond the tabletop battlefield.



Left to right: New York City Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott, I.S. 318 student Kenneth Martin, and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. The photo was taken by former I.S. 318 student Kamran Mumtaz who now works for the mayor.

Like his teammate Isaac, James works with GM Alexander Stripunsky, with whom he enjoys a close relationship. James speaks glowingly of his mentor, once observing that “everything you should be getting from a coach, I get from Mr. Stripunsky.” One focus of their work has been slowing down at the board and seeing more deeply into positions. “I used to play really fast; I think I’ve developed into a thinker. I’m really proud of using my time to develop ideas. When you think more, you tend to see more”.

The hours James has put in, at and away from the board, have been richly rewarded. He has represented the United States in international competition, and become a symbol of excellence at the Marshall Chess Club. His successes have been featured in the *New York Times*, local radio, and the *Chess Drum*, a website celebrating the accomplishments of chess players of African origin. Far from inflating his ego, James’ path has made him keenly aware of his position as a leader at 318. When his 6½/7 won K-8 Nationals last year, he observed that the program’s highest scorer was not him, but Mubassar Uddin: A sixth grader who

went 7-0 in the unrated section.

James raced out of the gate in Minneapolis, winning his first four games. However, the dream of an individual title ended on the stage in round five: James erred tactically and went down to eventual winner Ben Gershenov of New York. His momentum lost, James then failed to score against Ohio star John Lodger Hughes in round six, leaving him frustrated. 318’s fortunes in the team high school championship would rest in part on his ability to recover his form in time for round seven.

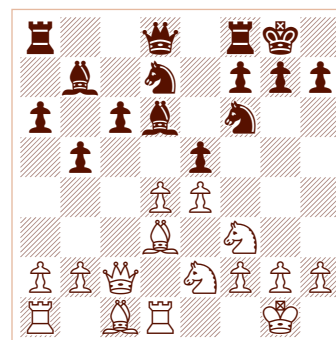
Semi-Slav (D46)

Andrew Tang (2170)
James Black (2305)
National High School Championship (4),
04.14.2012

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Nf3 e6 5. e3 Nbd7 6. Bd3 dxc4 7. Bxc4 b5 8. Bd3 Bd6 9. 0-0 0-0 10. Qc2 Bb7 11. Rd1 a6 12. e4 e5 13. Ne2

(see diagram next column)

When this position was reached in Alexander Chernin-Juraj Lipka, Black



After 13. Ne2

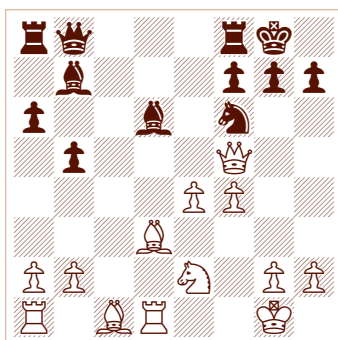
(FIDE 2426) preferred 13. ... Qc7. James decides to seek the initiative with a dynamic pawn sacrifice.

13. ... c5!? 14. dxe5 Nxe5 15. Nxe5 Bxe5 16. Qxc5 Qb8 17. f4?

This looks like the beginning of White’s problems. Trouble starts brewing on the a7-g1 diagonal very quickly now. 17. Ng3 improves, although James’ novelty has been successful: Houdini thinks Black has equalized here.

17. ... Bd6 18. Qf5

(see diagram top of next column)



After 18. Qf5

18. Qg5 should be played, denying Black a tempo to control g4.

18. ... Bc8! 19. Qg5 Ng4! 20. Nd4

20. Kf1 was forced, but White is in deep trouble.

20. ... Qa7 21. Be2 Be7 22. Qh5 g6 23. Qh3 Nf2 24. Qc3 Nxd1 25. Bxd1 b4 26. Qd3 Bc5 27. Be3 Rd8, White resigned.

A crisp win by James; a sharp pawn sacrifice in the opening, a strongly developed initiative, and a precise finish.

ISAAC

On almost any middle school team in the country, expert-rated Isaac Barayev would be the star. When he was in seventh grade, 318 assistant coach and alumnus Pobo Efekoro referred to Justus, James, and Isaac as the “big 3,” placing Barayev in the company of the school’s greatest ever players. The Forest Hills native gained 100 rating points in December of 2011, cracking 2100 for the first time. In his final year at 318, Isaac had become irreplaceable, a predictor of the team’s fortunes. During grade school nationals in Dallas, with Justus and James representing the United States at the World Youth, Isaac led the charge with 5/7 as 318 captured the eighth grade championship. At the city championships, Isaac’s dominant 5-0 led his team to a convincing victory in the junior high school division. The only time he slipped, at the high school state tournament in Saratoga, 318 was upset by a team of its own alumni, representing Edward Murrow. After the final round, Justus grinned at Isaac. “Don’t worry. We’ll get them back at high school (nationals).”

Isaac recently began a new training regimen, taking Spiegel’s recommendation to study with GM Alexander Stripunsky. Among other things, they study thematic positions for topics Stripunsky selects. Examples include rook versus pawns, the Bxh7 sacrifice, or mating nets. Isaac is often asked to evaluate a certain idea or continuation within 15 minutes before further study. He also works hard at

home, memorizing opening theory and solving problems. Isaac credits his new 1. d4 repertoire, learned from his coach, for “lots of good wins with white.”

Isaac started the tournament well, reaching 4/5. His draws were mutually well played, and one of the wins featured a characteristically dynamic Exchange sacrifice against Tin Phan (shown below). In the penultimate round, he faced NM Sam Schmakel, the lynchpin of Chicago’s Whitney Young school. We were able to predict the opening variation, and Isaac developed a serious initiative. Alas, the master slipped away with a full point, and Isaac returned shaking his head. With 4/6, it was time to regroup for the last round—a key game as black.

French Defense (C18)

Tin Phan (1688)

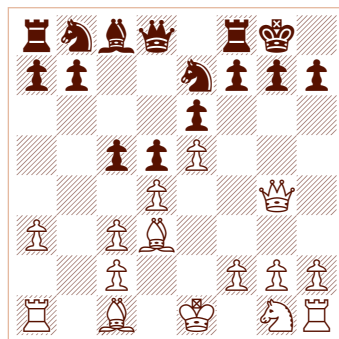
Isaac Barayev (2124)

National High School Championship (3), 04.14.2012

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. a3 Bxc3+ 5. bxc3 Ne7

Taking on e4 is more popular, but the text has been played by Petrosian and Vaganian, among others.

6. Qg4 0-0 7. e5 c5 8. Bd3



After 8. Bd3

From an unusual move order, we have arrived at an important theoretical position.

8. ... c4

This move is not so common and seems to have suffered a fair bit in practice; 8. ... Nbc6 would be normal.

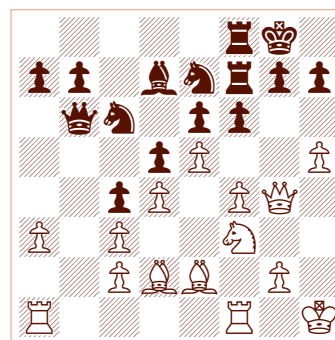
9. Be2 f6 10. f4 Nbc6

The first completely new move; the only master game to reach this position saw 11. ... fxe5.

11. Nf3 Qb6

11. ... Qa5 followed by ... Qa4 looks more concrete.

12. 0-0 Ng6 13. Kh1 Bd7 14. h4 Rf7 15. h5 Ng7 16. Bd2 Raf8!

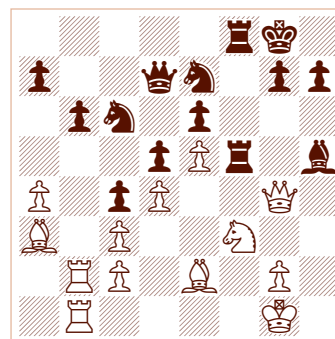


After 16. ... Raf8

17. Rfb1 Qc7 18. a4 Qc8 19. Bc1 Be8 20. Ba3

By moving the bishop, White loses the option of recapturing on e5 with the d-pawn. The next ten moves from Isaac are a tour de force.

20. ... fxe5 21. fxe5 Rf5 22. Rb2 Qd7 23. Rab1 b6 24. Kg1 Bxh5!?



After 24. ... Bxh5

The computer prefers taking with the rook, but Isaac has a very specific idea based on pressuring f3.

25. Qh3 Ng6 26. Bd1 Nf4 27. Qh4 Nxf2!

There it is!

28. Kxg2 Bxf3+ 29. Bxf3 Rxf3 30. Bxf8 Rxf8 31. Rh1 h6 32. Rh3 Qf7 33. Rb1 Qg6+ 34. Kh1 Qe4+

34. ... Qf7 improves, followed by the eventual transfer of the knight to a better square.

35. Qxe4 dxe4 36. Kg2

For tactical reasons, not the best square for the king; imagine a knight on f4!

36. ... Ne7 37. Re1 Rf4

37. ... Nd5!

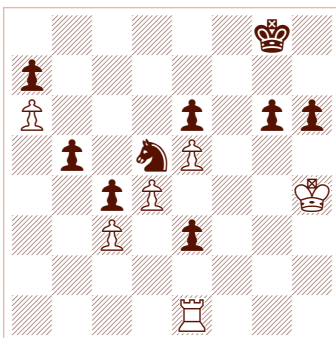
38. Kg3

38. Rhe3 should be played, with very reasonable drawing chances.

38. ... Nd5 39. a5 b5

39. ... bxa5 is simplest, with ideas of advancing both the a- and e-pawns.

40. a6 Rf3+ 41. Kg4 Rxh3 42. Kxh3 Nxc3 43. Kh4 g6 44. Rf1 Nd5 45. c3 e3 46. Re1



After 46. Re1

46. ... Nxc3!

Very well judged. Isaac has seen his queenside pawns will be unstoppable.

47. Rxe3 Nd5 48. Rg3 Kg7 49. Kg4 c3 50. Kf3 c2 51. Rg1 b4 52. Ke2 b3 53. Kd2 Nb4 54. Kc3 Na2+, White resigned.

A very strong game from Isaac, filled with interesting ideas.

2012 National High School Championship At A Glance

Date: April 13-15, 2012. **Location:**

Hyatt Regency Minneapolis, Minneapolis, Minnesota. **Top Team**

Finishers: *K-12 Championship:* 1st, 20:

I.S. 318 (Justus Williams, Isaac Barayev, Matthew Kluska, James Black);

2nd, 20: Hunter College Campus School (Alec Getz,

Aleksandr Ostrovskiy, Aaron Landesman, Lilia Poteat);

K-12 Under 1600: 1st, 20: Miami Senior High (Orestes Ordenez, Raul Rodriguez, Jossie Calderon, Matthew Solis);

2nd, 19½: I.S. 318 (Otto Schatz, Jack Wen, Vaughn Soso, Mariah McGreen);

K-12 Under 1200: 1st, 21: Abington High School (Eric Goldsborough, Benjamin Kruger, Ryan Klasky, Andrew Weinrich);

2nd, 20: South Dade Senior High School (Daniel Cruz, Andersen Hariril, Steven Rojo, Jonathan Armas);

K-12 Under 800: 1st, 20½: MS 118 (Mohinur Miah, Abdullah Ridwan, Darron McMorries, Kevin Singh);

2nd, 19½: St. Joseph Academy (Benjamin Hart, Cecilia Tackett, Megan Kaster, Jack Weil, Maximilian Schieber, Isaac Waters);

K-12 Unrated: 1st, 19½: Hinsdale Central High School (Athar Qureshi, Naveen Balaji, Michael Ren, Alan Chen);

2nd, 18½: Minneapolis South High School (Josiah Biernat, Max Eusterbrock, Michael Diaz, Mohamed Mohamed).

Chief Tournament Director: Francisco Guadalupe

MATTHEW

Going into the national championship, Justus, James, and Isaac were all considered likely scorers. But three would not be enough: A team's score at K-12 nationals is determined by adding the totals of its four top scorers. The fourth score would be a player developed the traditional 318 way: Years of chess instruction inside the school's walls. Enter Matthew Kluska. In December of 2011, his rating stood at 1396. Then something happened. A previously casual chessplayer caught the bug, and became one of the program's most studious, hardworking competitors.

"The 318 openings are easy to remember, but I felt my endings needed improvement." Matthew took out two endgame texts from the school library, working through them independently. He also benefited from an endgame class session with GM Sher, and started solving problems on his own. During our conversation about his study habits, he stopped, his thoughts interrupted by a recent game a friend played. "In Kenneth [Martin]'s last round game (at the junior high school nationals) there was a win in the ending: ... h5 and then you go ... Kh7-g6."

By April of 2012, Matthew's rating was 1844. While gaining 400 points, he had developed a preference for complex, asymmetrical positions: His French repertoire features the ... Rxf3 Exchange sacrifice in the Tarrasch, and against 1. d4 he aims for Nimzo-Indian structures. His taste in the opening is not easy to satisfy; Matthew stubbornly avoids ... d5 in queen pawn positions, treasuring his flexibility in the center.

Entering the high school nationals, Matthew was rated 1884, a personal best. However, things did not start well: An early blunder and opening miscue placed him at ½ out of 2. Aiming to reverse his fortunes, he took a disciplined course: Getting extra sleep every night and carefully blunder checking every move. He scored 3½ from the next 4, reaching 4/6 entering the last round. Though he was rated 1415 in December, Matthew Kluska would be playing for the high school national championship in the last round.

ROUND 7

Heading into the last round, the top of the standings looked like this:

I.S. 318: 16½

Hunter: 16½

Thomas Jefferson: 16

Catalina Foothills: 16

Assistant Principal John Galvin's sheet was divided into sections, each one listing the pairings and expected results of a different team. The rules permit play-

ers to consult their coaches if a draw is offered in the final round. The more complete the coach's information, the greater the chance of making a correct decision. But with the top of the table so packed, the players received unambiguous pregame instructions from Galvin and Spiegel: Fight for the win. The top of 318's scorecard looked like this:

Justus Williams: 4½/6

James Black: 4

Isaac Barayev: 4

Matthew Kluska: 4

Kenneth Martin: 4

At times, Spiegel wonders how much concept her students have of playing for the team: At the end of the day, chess is an individual sport, and the team score is calculated by adding four independent outcomes. But with the last round about to begin, there could be no doubt. None of the possible scorers took their instruction to avoid a draw as an infringement on their agency, an undue imposition. They were there as a team, and would doggedly pursue the result the team required.

Justus, James, and Isaac were all paired down, thanks to their high ratings. They would likely be the top three scorers. The toughest assignments fell to the A players, Matthew and Kenneth: Each would face an expert in a situation where only a win would do. Without one of them getting to 5 points, first place would likely be out of reach.

Kenneth received a nightmare pairing: Black versus Danny Feng, a 318 alumnus who entered the school as a beginner and became an expert, making him one of the greatest 'pure' products in the program's history. Spiegel excused herself from preparing for her former star, and Kenneth and I grimly sat down to prepare for a national championship game against his old teammate. On the way to the game, Mr. Galvin and Danny awkwardly crossed paths, drawing a question Danny knew the answer to: "Did you prepare for me?"

It was in vain. Danny sat down and played 1. a3, a move he uses as a transpositional tool when worried about preparation. Kenneth dutifully fought for the win, going up a pawn and rejecting multiple continuations that appeared drawish. But Danny was too solid. He set up a queenside blockade, then used a tactical resource to win two pawns and the game. Kenneth's hard work all tournament was rewarded with a gain in rating, but not the elusive fifth point his team needed.

James returned early and distraught: He had drawn his lower rated opponent. "Why is it that I can't buy a win?" Four queens had appeared on the board in a wild encounter, and James had been unable to regain control. He had started

with 4-0 but managed just half a point from the final three games. At this difficult personal moment, James' thoughts were with the team he played for. He stayed in the team room, waiting for the results that would determine its fate. Isaac Barayev was the next to return. He came back wearing a smile of relief; his had been a narrow escape. Despite an inferior position, he had rejected draws to pursue the necessary result. With his win, the outlook became considerably brighter. But James was fixated on the idea that his draw would cost the team dearly. He approached Isaac. "It's my fault. We're going to lose by half a point, and it's going to be my fault." Isaac's reply was immediate. "Last year it was my fault." Hunter had topped 318 by half a point the previous year, with Isaac not reaching his own high expectations.

Justus was next to return: He had won the most important game he had ever played for his school. His position had been difficult, and a draw would have suited him from a purely chess standpoint. "But I knew we needed as many points as we could get." For the second straight year, he scored 5½ out of 7 to lead the team in the high school nationals. Hours into the final Sunday in Minneapolis, everything rested on 318's unlikely board four. Matthew Kluska was locked in

battle with Miami expert Sam Silberman, from the Gulliver School. The game, which started as a quiet exchange Slav, burst into life: Kluska had accepted an uncomfortable king position in return for other positional advantages. As he had so many times in his eighth grade year, Matthew found a way. He crowned his comeback from ½ out of 2 with the most clutch win of his life, taking 318 to 20 points. But would it be enough?

A Catalina Foothills versus Thomas Jefferson pairing had ended in an early draw, ultimately helping knock both teams out of first place contention. Hunter, however, had picked up three wins so far. Only Alec Getz remained, the picture of concentration, locked in battle with Minnesotan Matthew Dahl. Getz needed a win for Hunter to overtake 318. The tension of the moment was not lost on John Galvin, watching from the sidelines. "Both teams fought so hard. ... they should call the whole thing a draw." It was strange to think we were rooting for Alec Getz to come up short. He was Hunter's rock, tying for first in 2010 and scoring an unbeaten 6/7 in 2011. Like his Hunter teammates, he was a class act on and off the board. Knowing a draw would not suffice for his team, Getz bravely continued in a difficult rook

ending, trying to squeeze blood from a stone. Finally he accepted the inevitable and agreed to a draw, placing Hunter and 318 in a tie for first place.

Word of 318's superior tiebreaks reached the team room quietly. Galvin walked in with a single index finger raised in the air, the universal sign for "first." When Spiegel noticed, she wore the exhaustion, disbelief, and release of tension on her face. Celebrations began. Alumnus Pobo Efekoro ran down the hallway, nearly trampling Spiegel. Galvin permitted himself a fist pump, the first of the entire weekend. For a brief moment, a few granola bars assumed the role of projectiles, hurled across the room in an outpouring of joy. Elizabeth Spiegel, that most intense, most serious of teachers, just smiled. Her students made history, but they were, after all, middle schoolers. ■

See the individual champion's report beginning on the next page.

There are many opportunities now for chess scholarships. Check Chess Life Online regularly for announcements about application deadlines and general announcements. Two sources are www.utdallas.edu/chess/scholarships/ and uschestrust.org.

CHECK OUT USCF'S CORRESPONDENCE CHESS RATED EVENTS!

2012 Open Correspondence Chess Golden Knights Championship

USCF's 65th
ANNUAL

\$1,000 FIRST PRIZE

(plus title of USCF's Golden Knights Champion and plaque)

**2nd place \$600 • 3rd place \$400 • 4th place \$300 • 5th place \$200
6th thru 10th place \$100 each • ENTRY FEE: \$25**

These USCF Correspondence Chess events are rated and open to all USCF members who reside on the North American continent, islands, or Hawaii, as well as those USCF members with an APO or FPO address. USCF members who reside outside of the North American continent are welcome to participate in e-mail events. Your USCF membership must remain current for the duration of the event, and entry fees must be paid in U.S. dollars. Those new to USCF Correspondence Chess, please estimate your strength: **Class A:** 1800-1999 (very strong); **Class B:** 1600-1799 (strong); **Class C:** 1400-1599 (intermediate); **Class D:** 1399 and below (beginner level). **Note:** Prize fund based on 300 entries and may be decreased proportionately per number of entries assigned.

2012 E-mail Correspondence Chess Electronic Knights Championship

USCF's 9th
ANNUAL

\$700 FIRST PRIZE

(plus title of USCF's Electronic Knights Champion and plaque)

2nd place \$400 • 3rd place \$300 • 4th thru 10th place \$100 each • ENTRY FEE: \$25

These USCF Correspondence Chess events are rated and open to all USCF members with e-mail access. Your USCF membership must remain current for the duration of the event, and entry fees must be paid in U.S. dollars. Maximum number of tournament entries allowed for the year for each player is ten. **Note:** Prize fund based on 200 entries and may be decreased proportionately per number of entries assigned.

TO ENTER: 800-903-USCF(8723) OR FAX 931-787-1200 OR ONLINE AT WWW.USCHESS.ORG

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If using VISA, need V-code _____ Check here if you do not wish to have an opponent who is incarcerated.
*Note: This may slow down your assignment.

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Two or six-game options. **ENTRY FEE: \$5.**

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1st-place winner receives a trophy.

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Seven-player class-level pairings, one game with each of six opponents.

1st-place winner receives \$130 cash prize and a certificate signed by Victor Palciauskas.

ENTRY FEE: \$25.

John W. Collins Memorial Class Tournaments

Four-player, double round-robin with class-level pairings (unrateds welcome).

1st-place winner receives a John W. Collins certificate.

ENTRY FEE: \$7.

E-MAIL RATED EVENTS (NEED E-MAIL ACCESS):

Lightning Match

Two players with two or six-game option. **ENTRY FEE: \$5.**

Swift Quads

Four-player, double round-robin format.

1st-place prize merchandise credit of \$30.

ENTRY FEE: \$10.

Walter Muir E-Quads (websaver chess)

Four-player, double round-robin e-mail format tournament with class-level pairings.

1st-place receives a certificate.

ENTRY FEE: \$7.

Please circle event(s) selected.

NOTE: Except for Lightning Matches, Swift Quads, Walter Muir E-Quads & Electronic Knights, players will use post office mail, unless opponents agree to use e-mail.