

Mike Zacate

# Nomination Form



## HALL OF FAME NOMINEE

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Name of Nominee: Michael E. "Mike" Zacate  
*(first, middle, last)*

### ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Craig Anderson

Phone: 309-663-6377

Street Address: 2715 McGraw Drive

City, State, Zip Code: Bloomington, Illinois 61704

Signed: Craig Anderson

Email: mtroha@ihsa.org

State Association Verification? True

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

**Please Check Appropriate Nomination Category:**

Performing Arts

Name of Nominee: Michael E. "Mike" Zacate  
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: IHSA, 2715 McGraw Drive  
(street address)

Bloomington, Illinois 61704  
(city, state, zip)

Email: mtroha@ihsa.org

Phone: 309-663-6377 Date of Birth: 11/9/1940

School Affiliation (if any) Evergreen Park High School

City: Evergreen Park State: Illinois

Place of Birth: Springfield, Illinois Date of Retirement: 7/1/2010

Is the nominee still active in any area of athletics or performing arts other than the category for which he/she is being nominated? No

If yes, please explain:

If deceased, date of death:  
11/12/23

Name of Spouse or Closest Living Relative: Betsy Zacate (daughter)

Address: 212 W Washington #1610,, Chicago, Illinois 60606

Phone: 708-269-0312

## Schools Attended:

Name of School	City and State	Year Graduated	Degree
High School: West Rockford	Rockford, Illinois	1958	
College/University: Beloit College	Beloit, Wisconsin	1962	Bachelor of Science
Post Graduate School: Northern Illinois University	DeKalb, Illinois	1965	Masters Degree

# Performing Arts

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## **Participation/Career Description/Biography:**

Mike founded the statewide "team chess" tournament, which soon became part of the IHSA program, and for 43 years (1968-2010) served as its tournament director. His team at Evergreen Park High School was the first in Illinois to arrange matches with chess clubs at other schools, outside of some early matches played among Chicago public schools.

Mike was also a founding coach of the Illinois Chess Coaches Association and served that group in various capacities, most importantly as its longtime secretary. In that role he kept not just the history of the organization but a record of virtually every high school chess tournament held during his long tenure.

Mike's work in the high schools led him to become a certified tournament director (TD) of the United States Chess Federation, during a period when that group standardized the administration of the tournaments it sanctioned. Mike was part of the second group to be certified as national tournament directors (one year after the first group). As a national TD, Mike traveled around the country throughout the year to direct all sorts of events, from youth tournaments to the highest levels of adult competition and everything in between. His duties at most of these tournaments included the hiring of officials, ruling on disputes, the arduous task of pairing individual matches for hundreds of competitors, and all the recordkeeping involved in such an event.

Mike's ability to communicate the rules of chess and enforce those rules equitably, in a calm yet assertive manner, was perhaps his greatest strength. Through the years he mentored countless coaches on how to operate an interscholastic chess program at their schools. He then trained many of those coaches, as well as some of their players, to be tournament officials.

## **Contributions Athletics/NFHS/Education Philosophy:**

### **Personal Records/Honors/Awards**

The event Mike Zacate founded has grown into the largest "team chess" tournament in the country, with about 1,500 students from 128 teams competing every February in Peoria. First held at Evergreen Park High School, where Mike was a science teacher, it grew for seven years until he convinced IHSA Assistant Executive Director David Fry that chess was worthy of being sponsored by the state association. From that point, in 1975, Zacate served as tournament director of the state meet every year except one (when he was ill) until he stepped down from that role after the 2010 meet. He took a year off to enjoy retirement, then continued to serve as a tournament rules official through 2020. The upcoming tournament (2024) will mark the 50th year of IHSA sponsorship.

The team format — where a set number of players from two teams go head-to-head at the same time and on the same long table — was not unheard of in the 1960s, but Zacate and the chess coaches who flocked to the new competition soon refined the concept. Perhaps most important was the weighting of the individual matches, which results in the best players from each team lining up against each other to earn the largest portion of the overall team score, while less experienced players compete for fewer points. This ensures that players are matched with similarly talented opponent. Because it involves players of all skills, the team format creates a camaraderie that is missing in individual chess competitions, and keeps players of all skill levels involved in the game.

Every year, about 180 IHSA member schools organize a chess team of at least six members and compete against other schools. Many of the teams have significantly more than the minimum six players on their roster. About 150 of these teams compete in the IHSA state series, which includes sectional meets that feed into the state final, held at the Peoria Civic Center since 2000. With 128 teams qualifying and twelve players allowed on each team's roster, about 1,500 high school students compete annually in the state final tournament.

By our estimate, up to 40,000 Illinois high school students have participated in team chess programs since Mike initiated the statewide event. Very few of those students were from the elite group who sharpen their skills year-round in non-high school tournaments. Most of the students

would not have played chess competitively but for the high school chess team. Some of the students had never played chess at all before being encouraged to join. Mike's contributions to the world of interscholastic competition have been wide-ranging, long-lasting, and of the highest order. Without Mike's initiative and drive, the IHSA would probably not have a chess program. Even if it did, it would not come close to the one that Mike Zacate dedicated his life to for more than 50 years. Sadly, after the association began work on the nomination process in October, Mike learned that the cancer he had been fighting for a few years was no longer responding to treatment. He died on November 12, 2023.

### **Professional Achievements**

- Founder and member of the Illinois Chess Coaches Association
- Certified tournament director (TD) of the United States Chess Federation

### **Other Information**

The IHSA understands that chess is not a "performing art" in the traditional sense. Under the auspices in which the IHSA conducts its business, we would consider chess to be in the same category as the performing arts. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be any category among the National High School Hall of Fame nominations that is open to educators whose interscholastic work was in non-athletic activities such as debate, Scholastic Bowl, journalism, and esports. Even nomination in the "Other" category is precluded by the requirement of "contributions to interscholastic athletics."

We urge the NFHS Hall of Fame Selection Committee to consider an exemption for Mike's nomination in the Performing Arts category or ask that the committee seek out other avenues so that worthy individuals like Mike can be nominated and recognized for future enshrinement in the High School Hall of Fame.

# Letters of Recommendation



Esteemed members of the NFHS Hall of Fame Screening Committee,

The Illinois High School Association is proud to nominate Michael E. "Mike" Zacate to the National High School Hall of Fame.

Mike founded the statewide "team chess" tournament, which soon became part of the IHSA program, and for 43 years (1968-2010) served as its tournament director. His team at Evergreen Park High School was the first in Illinois to arrange matches with chess clubs at other schools, outside of some early matches played among Chicago public schools.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Craig Anderson  
Executive Director  
Illinois High School Association  
309-663-6377  
canderson@ihsa.org



# ILLINOIS CHESS COACHES ASSOCIATION

November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023

To Whom it May Concern,

It is a distinct honor and privilege to draft this letter in support of Mike Zacate for the nomination to the National High School Hall of Fame. It is not hyperbole to say that he changed the face of high school chess with his over 50 years of devoted work to the players, coaches, and schools of Illinois. Without Mike Zacate, Illinois Chess simply would not exist in its current form, if at all.

Mike's work began in the late 1960s when travel restrictions prevented an official statewide chess tournament. He worked with his players to run an invitational event that later became the Illinois High School Association Chess Team State Championship in 1974. He continued working with that event for decades, guiding its growth and development. Today, the teams, the competitive conferences, the advisory committee, the rulebook (which is unique in the world of chess), and the tournament system are all the results of Mike's work. During the 2021-2022 season, 178 schools participated in team chess play, representing approximately 2000 players; before Mike, both of those numbers were zero.

To be specific, Mike Zacate drove countless miles on country roads from before the interstate highways were completed until long after they were done. He did this a dozen or more weekends each year for four decades while coaching his own teams, working as a full-time teacher, and raising a family. He taught teachers how to play chess and coach chess while organizing them into conferences to support one another. Mike processed paperwork and newsletters in a time long before computers, running the entire state's season and tournaments with index cards and brainpower. His early insistence on the weighted board-team format that we use enshrined the specific type of team-chess that makes the Illinois system so special. What other states hope to emulate began with Mike and all that time, travel, paper cuts, sweat, and time.

Most importantly, Mike paved the path forward for future generations to continue growing the sport. His creation of the Illinois Chess Coaches Association ensures that we have a system to continue growing coaches, tournament directors, and programs well into the future. In 2011, Mike rallied coaches to begin taking on the tasks that he had been doing for decades. Because he had invested in the development of his peers, four ready-and-willing officers stepped forward to do the job. And then he stuck around to support those officers as they tried to emulate the system he built. As late as 2015, Mike was still around as a tournament official while his daughter was the Head Steward. And as long as his health would allow, Mike was there to continue pushing chess forward with his selfless support.

Simply put, Mike Zacate devoted a lifetime of efforts to ensure that students of all abilities and backgrounds could enjoy the benefits of chess and team competition. Mike is the reason that 2000+ players participate in Illinois Chess each season. He built, from the ground up, a system of team chess that enriches the lives of everyone touched by it. No amount of wording or fancy phrasing will ever sufficiently describe the contribution that Mike Zacate has made not just to chess, but to the lives of everyone in Illinois and all the ripple effects beyond that. His sacrifice has provided thousands of players with the ability to compete deeply with their minds while engaged in a team sport. That work deserves the recognition for which Mike is nominated and the ICCA strongly recommends that Mike Zacate be inducted to the Hall of Fame.

Dylan Canavan  
ICCA PRESIDENT

Chris Aderhold  
ICCA VICE-PRESIDENT

Geroge Dzuricko  
ICCA TREASURER

Erik Czerwin  
ICCA SECRETARY

November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023

National Federation of State High School Associations,

I wish to recommend to the board the nomination of Michael Zacate to the National High School Hall of Fame.

I have worked with him since the late sixties at chess tournaments and with the Illinois Chess Association. He was a National Tournament Director (NTD) in the US Chess Federation and worked many important events like the US Open, National Scholastic Chess Tournaments held in various locations in the US and other major events.

An interesting tournament he worked for many years was the Queen City Classic Chess Tournament held at Paul Brown Stadium in Cincinnati, home of the Cincinnati Bengals. This tournament is associated with the Cris Collinsworth ProScan Fund. This tournament would usually have around 600 players.

His most important contribution, in my opinion, was the development of the Illinois High School Team Championship in Chess. This started as a simple event not associated with the IHSA and was eventually made an official activity with recognized official team champions. He was the Chief Tournament Director for many years. Even after not being chief TD, he worked as one of the stewards monitoring the event. This tournament has grown so large that Sectionals have been added and the qualifiers from the Sectionals advance to the State finals. In an interesting side to this, in 2011 the Illinois Elementary Schools started a grade school championship.

The number of students who have benefitted from the simple idea of holding a chess team championship is huge. Chess in the schools and its benefits for the students has been known for years and is being implemented not just in the US but around the world. The Chess in Education Commission for FIDE (the governing body for the game of chess around the world) is one of the most important commissions and their work is regularly featured.

Best Regards,

Walter Brown

National Tournament Director

International Arbiter in FIDE

Member of the Qualification Commission in FIDE since 2011

**JAMES R. AMAN, PH.D.**  
**1815 PINWOOD LN.**  
**JOLIET, IL 60433**

National High School Hall of Fame  
Indianapolis, IN

November 12, 2023

Re: Michael E. Zacate

Dear Committee:

In an association with chess extending more decades than I care to recall – most of it around scholastic chess – I have never met a person more deserving of a spot in the National High School Hall of Fame than Michael Zacate. His impact on the lives of young people has been monumental. Through his organizing of the Illinois High School Association Team Chess Championship, he has touched the lives of, literally, thousands of young men and women over the decades that competition has been held. In February of 2024, the tournament will celebrate its Golden Anniversary – 50 years of chess competition at a very high level involving high schools throughout the state and feeding players into national events and titles. Without Mike, this never would have happened.

Twenty years ago, I was asked to handle the pairing duties for a very large scholastic tournament in Cincinnati. Facing multiple sections of competition and expecting over 400 players, I needed to recruit additional help for the job. Mike was recommended to me and joined the staff. For several years, we worked that tournament together. When I moved to Illinois, Mike pulled me into the state team chess championship and, later, onto the organizing board for a middle school state championship. We had become good friends over those years, not living very far apart and sharing many interests in common. Mike drew me into the staffs of national chess events being held in Illinois, too, as he did for some of the young people who had competed in the high school tournament through the years.

And it is in this latter context that Mike Zacate earned, I feel, a place in the Hall of Fame. That high school tournament became a lightning rod for chess programs in high schools across Illinois. The success of those programs then inspired the creation of the middle school tournament as a feeder for the high schools. Each year, players at the high school tournament are asked to stand if they are playing in their fourth year there. It is inspiring to see so many young men and women stand every year! They are learning a game requiring mental discipline, continuous study, sparking curiosity, and modeling good sportsmanship. The game and those skills are ones which have undoubtedly been passed along to competitors' children and grandchildren. I know several high school team coaches who played in the tournament in their own high school years. So when I say that Mike's efforts have touched thousands of lives, it is not hyperbole.

As a U.S. Chess Federation-certified National Tournament Director, Mike Zacate has also been active on the national stage. He has directed or been on the staff of numerous national title events, both scholastic and non-scholastic, over his many decades. From the classroom to the chess hall, Mike has

been a force for postivity. He is the very model of what a Hall of Fame member should represent. It is with great pride that I support the nomination of my friend Michael Zacate for the National High School Hall of Fame.

I must, sadly, insert before sending this letter for inclusion in the nomination packet that my friend passed away quietly this morning. He would have been humbled to know that this nomination was underway and would have said he did not deserve it. But he would have been wrong. Everyone who knew Mike or came across his path or through his tournaments or classrooms is the lesser today for his loss.

Very sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James R. Arnan", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

James R. Arnan, PhD

USCF Senior Tournament Director

Support  
Data

# Tournament chess clicks with teens seeking tough, friendly competition

By JIM STAHLY JR.  
Pantagraph staff

It's the quietest scene including 600 high school students you could picture.

They were silent, and wore looks of concentration one would expect at a math test. They could have been in a library, but for the clicking.

But the silence belied the action, as 74 teams from throughout the state battled at the 1995 Illinois High School Association Chess Team State Tournament.

Four area teams, University High School; Washington; Olympia High School, Stanford; and Roanoke-Benson High School, Roanoke, competed in the tournament won by Moline High School.

Among the Board 1 winners was Kim Goodwin, a U High freshman who won five matches and had one draw. Board 1 was where each school's best players played.

The irregular rhythm of clicks, sounding like a slow typist, was made each time someone moved a piece, then reached over and pressed a button on the clock.

Stress was obvious — competi-

tors sat, some still, some fidgeting as they watched their opponents' move.

Unlike nontournament play, time is of prime importance in tournament chess. According to tournament director Julian Morrison, each player has 70 minutes to play, and if no checkmate is achieved, the person who runs out of time first loses.

"The early moves go pretty fast, but in the middle it slows down considerably," he said. "It gets real hectic down to the end. The player that has the coolest head is probably going to win."

Why do people subject themselves to this? Who plays chess, anyway?

Competitive people, according to Mike Zacate, chairman of the committee that oversees the tournament. "You find a lot of wrestlers in chess for that reason," Zacate said.

But they're not the only ones.

Both men and women, athletes and nonathletes alike find chess a venue for their competitive spirit.

"It's the closest thing to athletics that's not athletics," said Kent

Hieronymus, chess coach of Olympia.

Zacate added that chess is an attractive way for disabled or injured people to participate in a school activity. "Even somebody who's broken both arms and can't move their pieces can play," he said.

Zacate's daughter Betsy, is a case in point. A self-described competitor, she took to chess when she injured her knees playing basketball.

"I had to do something. It was a way to compete for school," said Betsy Zacate, 21. She now assists with the tournament, and likes the imposed equality of the chess board. "It's not 'oh, the tall guy's gonna win,'" she said.

Giang Tang, a 10th-grade chess player at U High, fits the mold.

"It gets pretty competitive. But I like to win strategically," she said.

But Garrett Scott, coach of U High's chess team, said the competitiveness is different from athletics. After many of the games, opponents will stay and replay the game, explaining their moves to each other.



Clipped By:

sj385

Wed, Nov 1, 2023

# CHESS: Long nights with kings and queens

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

schools participated in the state competition.

This season 157 schools have registered, meaning they have shown they intend to participate in the tournament. However, not all will qualify, said Mike Zacate, of the Illinois Chess Coaches Association, who was director of last year's tournament.

The IHSA format, used by most schools throughout the regular season, has each team fielding eight players on boards 1-8. A team's best player competes on the No. 1 board, which is weighted to give 12 team points to the winner. Each board after that gets one fewer team point all the way to the No. 8 board, which yields five points for the victorious player.

"Our format makes this very much a team sport, like wrestling or cross-country," Zacate said. "Yes, you have individual matches, but everyone's result counts toward the team total, and that means everyone contributes. You see teammates high-fiving someone at the bottom of the lineup just as much as you will someone at the top. It creates a lot of camaraderie."

This is evident at Whitney Young, where lively after-school practices are noisy, joke-filled sessions where Kayin, the current No. 1 player, and his teammates exchange good-natured barbs. Kayin is the group's star

now, but he's the first to admit that his grip on the No. 1 board is tenuous. Teammates Jose Rodriguez and Josh Stapleton push him hard. Last year Jose played the No. 1 board at state, and Kayin was No. 2.

"We have a lot of good players, probably the best overall talent since I've been here," said Young coach Ed Dziedzic, whose team finished 11th in the overall standings in 2005. "You need depth to win state. You always have to have goals, and I don't see why we couldn't do this..."

The key to that improvement, Dziedzic said, is not to be afraid to take on better players — a competitive commitment Kayin demonstrated, young as he was, on that trip to Russia.

"We really didn't know what we were doing, and at first, we just walked around in the parks looking for matches," Lester Barclay recalled. "There weren't any games for him, so we played each other, and he started beating up on me, as usual. Well, it didn't take long for two black guys from America playing chess together to draw a crowd. Pretty soon people were lining up to play him, 30-year-old guys with chess sets from the 1920s."

A year after going to Russia, Kayin was winning age-group championships in the prestigious Chicago Open tournament. As a freshman last spring — the first year he was eligible — he won the Illinois championship in the U.S. Chess Federation's annual Denker competition for high school players. He recently achieved the federation's "expert" rating, a significant milestone, according to Kayin's coach.

"It probably isn't noticeable to the outside person, but I played against lots of different styles because they play a lot different over there," Kayin said.

"Some turned out to be pretty surprised I could play at the level I did. Chess is just a lot deeper in their society, unlike here."

Kayin, who considered the experience he gained in Russia invaluable, noted that he won more games than he lost — and that he would like to return some day.

"There's no such thing as a perfect game because there are so many moves and so many ways to win," he said. "Even when you do win, there might've been a better way. I like the competitiveness best about chess."

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Clipped By:

sj385

Wed, Nov 1, 2023

## NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

# High school chess programs gain popularity

By Lauren Oosterlinck

Whoever believes that the chess craze ended with international chess champion Bobby Fischer in 1972 is sadly misinformed. Although it is not the most widely supported or recognized activity when compared to football or basketball, it has quite a following among American high schoolers, especially in Illinois, Arizona and New Mexico.

Mike Zacate of Mokena, Illinois has been a chess coach since 1966, when he expressed interest in sponsoring a chess club at Evergreen Park (Illinois) High School. Since then, he went on to serve as chairperson of the Illinois High School Association (IHSA) Advisory Committee on chess for the past 32 years, rules official for the South Inter-Conference Association since its formation in 1973, a lifetime member of the United States Chess Federation (USCF), and a chess coach at various Illinois high schools until his full retirement in 2006. Certified by the USCF as National Tournament Director, he still travels regularly to be part of the USCF tournament directing staff at scholastic events with more than 1,000 participants.

Many people might not realize there are such organizations and tournaments for an activity such as chess, but many dedicated students and coaches are highly involved in them across the country.

In fact, a number of individuals from Illinois have become Master-ranked chess players in high school and later in life — a few have even played in international events.

Zacate was the person who set into motion plans for the first Illinois state high school championships. In May 1968, the first tournament was held at Evergreen Park High School, where 24 varsity and 10 freshman/sophomore teams consisting of five players apiece competed. The year after that, 50 varsity and 24 freshman/sophomore teams competed as a result of invitations sent to all high schools in the state.

Year after year, the state tournaments hosted by Zacate grew bigger

and better-known. As the tournaments grew, Zacate tried to get the tournaments sanctioned by the IHSA. Finally, in 1975 the first state tournament was organized and run by the IHSA, with two classes (Class A for schools of fewer than 750 students and Class AA for schools of 750 students or more).

Last year, between 190 and 200 high schools in Illinois had organized chess programs, with 154 of those schools registered for the IHSA team championship. More than 30 Chicago Public Schools and approximately 10 other schools from around the state had chess programs, but did not register for the event.

Participation in chess events tends to be more male-populated these days. According to Zacate, girls participation was rare before 1980. Gradually, girls participation increased until the mid-1990s, when it reached its current level of about 10 percent statewide.

“By many measurements, chess continues to increase in popularity and participation. The number of individuals and schools participating in conferences and tournaments has grown over the years, both on the state and national levels,” Zacate said.

Chess programs in Illinois have been started by both student and teacher/coach interest and initiative. Zacate believes the reason why chess is not offered more commonly at schools is due to the lack of administrative and school board support.

“I guarantee that if a football or basketball coach quit, the school administration would have a replacement the next season. On the other hand, when a chess coach leaves a school, the program commonly disappears,” he said.

There is still a great deal of activity across the state for active teams. Fourteen conferences have season schedules with awards this year. A number of other schools have interscholastic chess teams playing in tournaments and dual matches independent of an organized conference.

In addition to conference games,



*High school chess programs have grown nationwide, especially in Illinois.*

Saturday tournaments are held about twice a month. Conference play is usually between October and early February, but a few schools continue to practice in preparation for the USCF National High School Championship in April, and some continue club play until the end of the school year.

Chess events have increased in frequency and participation at a drastic rate since its beginnings.

According to Zacate, regular chess conferences were held as early as 1922. Back then, there was only one tournament for high school players in Illinois. There were no national events for high school players and now there are two. In the late 1970s, there were six conferences, a few tournaments, the IHSA state team championship and a USCF National High School Championship. Since that time, the number of conferences has grown from six to 14, the number of tournaments from three to 19, and the number of teams in the IHSA championship from 60 to 120. The USCF Nationals have grown from 500 to 1,500 students and a second high school event by grade level will be added in December.

According to Zacate, among the major incentives chess offers is that boys and girls can be part of the same competing unit, and it can be played by anyone, regardless of their physical or mental ability.

“Whether blind, injured or ill, a student can still be an important member of a competing school team,” he said.

He added that students with mul-

tiple sclerosis, confined to a wheelchair or even those with mental handicaps have excelled while playing on chess teams.

"I have discovered that most straight-A students make for poor chess team members — they are unfamiliar with not succeeding and often do not handle well the stress or the possibility of losing," Zacate added.

On the other hand, Zacate has seen instances in which Special Education students have done exceedingly well playing on a chess team. At Dolton (Illinois) Thornridge High School, six Special Education students were in the starting lineup that captured the division championship in their conference.

According to Ron Kensek, director of the 17-school Albuquerque (New Mexico) Schools Chess League (ASCL), chess tournaments and team activities have been prevalent in the state since the 1940s.

The New Mexico Activities Association (NMAA) offers high school team tournaments that include regions in Albuquerque and in four geographic quadrants. It offers separate events for small-enrollment high schools and large-enrollment high schools (small being Classes A to AA and large being Classes AAA to AAAAA).

Andy Nowak, who is the NMAA chief tournament director and the Northern Schools Chess League director, created the New Mexico Scholastic Chess Organization to help perpetuate scholastic tournaments. Nowak also developed state scholastic chess tournaments for individuals in 1975, which are now open to grades K-6, K-9 and K-12. These championships are rated by the USCF — meaning that players are given a rating comparing themselves to other players around the nation. The USCF also offers national versions of those same events.

New Mexico has sent several chess players to the Arnold Denker Tournament of High School Champions, a USCF-rated event named after the late Arnold Denker, who was a Grandmaster and prominent figure in the development of chess. Among them, Santa Fe resident Jesse Kraai,

who is now an International Master, represented the state three times at the competition.

Three years ago, Susan Polgar, who is a former women's world chess champion, started a national girls championship for grades 9-12 along the lines of the Denker tournament. Anna Smoak, a sophomore at Albuquerque (New Mexico) Academy, represented New Mexico in that tournament in both 2003 and 2005.

Some traditionally strong high school teams in the NMAA are Los Alamos High School, Albuquerque Academy and Silver City High



*An Illinois chess participant studies the board.*

School. Last year, Santa Fe High School won the NMAA large-school competition, while Penasco High School won the small-school tournament.

Competitive high school chess tournaments in Arizona started in the 1970s, according to Leigh Trudgen, the Arizona Interscholastic Association (AIA) state chess director.

Currently, there are about 50 high schools that compete in AIA-sponsored chess programs. Most Arizona high schools have a chess club, but Trudgen noted that not all participate in competitions sponsored by the AIA.

Unfortunately, it appears that chess' popularity in Arizona peaks with the younger crowd, but declines once the students reach high school.

"It is very popular with elementary school children, as there are

many tournaments for these young people that can have more than 100 in attendance," Trudgen said. "However, as they get older, other things compete with their time and attention, such as their increased academic work load, extracurricular activities and jobs."

Among other contributing factors for the decline in high school chess participation are that it is often difficult to find a coach or sponsor; most tournaments are held on Saturdays (some teachers do not want to give up their Saturdays); the cost involved with transportation to events, equipment and the coach's stipend; and because players can win money at USCF national tournaments. According to AIA rules, if they win money, they cannot participate in AIA chess events.

Approximately 10 regional and statewide high school tournaments are held in Arizona each year. Most can be attended by all schools, but the championships require a team or an individual to qualify. The USCF holds national tournaments several times each year for players of all ages.

One of the state's top chess programs may be found at Tucson (Arizona) Catalina Foothills High School. In addition to winning the past two state titles, Foothills won the K-9 national title in 2004, the national high school title in 2005 and the tenth-grade national title in 2006. Foothills' coach, Robby Adamson, was the state individual high school champion from 1986 to 1989.

"We have an incredible group of kids," Adamson said. "I have to credit the local and state organizations that offer our kids the opportunity to play. It's very organized — they have a good system in place, which makes it easier for good players to rise."

Interestingly, an Arizona high school won the national high school chess championship every year Adamson was either on a high school team or coaching one. ■

*Oosterlinck was a fall semester intern in the NFHS Publications/Communications Department. She is a senior at Franklin (Indiana) College, where she is majoring in journalism.*

10 THE STAR: Sunday, June 3, 1979

By NEWTON BERRY

No one on the Illinois chess scene is involved with the game on more levels than Michael Zacate of Mokena. He is the current president of the Illinois Chess association (ICA), secretary-statistician of the SICA (South Interconference association), president of the Illinois Junior Chess foundation, and chairman of the Advisory Committee on Chess for IHSA (Illinois High School association). A 38-year-old science teacher, Mike is also a highly successful chess coach at Evergreen Park high school. During the years 1968-77, his teams were a chess power both in the south suburbs and in the state.

Zacate-coached teams have won the Frosh-Soph tourney twice, finished third once and fourth once. The 1968 Evergreen Park varsity took first in a high school invitational tournament at Rich East, while their Frosh-Soph team - unable to find competition at the lower level - edged out the other varsities to finish second in the event. The varsity team finished third in the state that year, the Frosh-Soph team first. And in 1974, Evergreen Park brought home a national high school championship (reserve section) under Mike's tutelage.

As a player, Mike has won four tournaments, including a 1972 chess coaches' tournament in Rockford and a 1974 Proviso event. For the past two years, he has won one of chessdom's most colorful events, the competition sponsored by Moraine Valley Community college in conjunction with its annual Renaissance fair. What makes this event so unusual is the fact that the final game is played with human chess pieces. Mike is also active in postal chess.

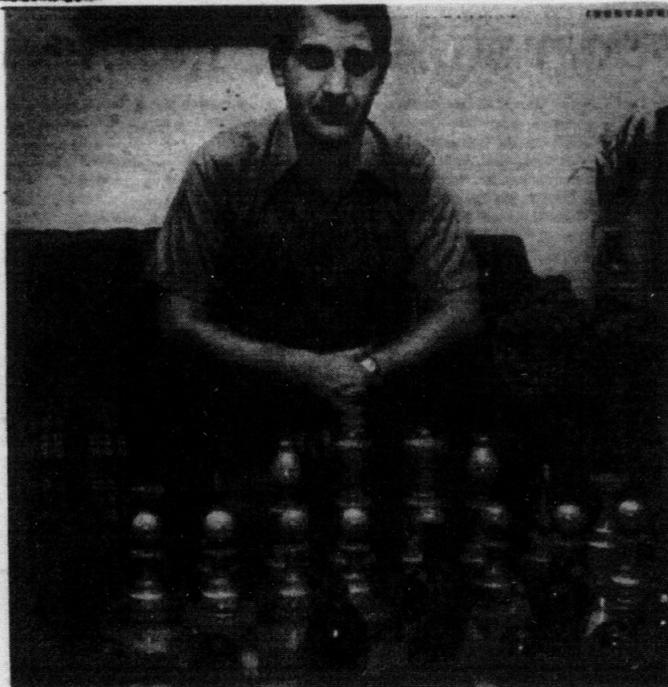
**THE FOLLOWING** interview took place on May 20, in Mike's car as the two of us drove into Chicago for an ICA meeting.

**BERRY:** How did you become involved with chess?

**ZACATE:** I learned how to move the pieces at age four or five by watching my grandfather and an uncle play. Then I got involved seriously as a chess coach at Evergreen Park in 1966 or '67. There was virtually no organized high school team competition then, so I began to promote it. We held the first state team tourney at Evergreen Park on an invitational basis. We put the kids up in the gym - girls in the nurse's office - at night, as most of the schools had little or no budget for chess.

**BERRY:** Sounds risky.

**ZACATE:** You couldn't put that many football or basketball players together for so long and have the place still repairable, much less coming out as well as it went in.



Michael Zacate

## Of Pawns and Kings

# Straight from the top

But the chess players were very well behaved. My goal all those years was to get the IHSA to assume title responsibility for high school chess, so it would be on a continuing basis. That's happened now for the last five years.

**BERRY:** What is the Illinois Junior Chess foundation doing to encourage young players?

**ZACATE:** We donated the money necessary to have the Illinois Individual High School tournament (run by the IHSA) nationally rated. That means we paid for USCF memberships for those young players who weren't already members. We also paid the

rating fees. We're hoping next spring to bring the National Elementary and the National Junior High tourneys to Illinois.

**BERRY:** What about your grant program?

**ZACATE:** We're awarding some \$25 playing grants to promising elementary and junior high players to attend certain state and national tournaments they might not otherwise have the opportunity to go to. Four \$50 scholarships are awarded to high school seniors for post secondary training.

**BERRY:** Awarded for chess excellence?

**ZACATE:** The grants encourage excellence. The scholarships reward participation. It pays the student back for the support

he's given chess while in school.  
**BERRY:** Tell us a little about the Illinois Chess association

**ZACATE:** The ICA goes all the way back to the 1930s, but until the early '70s it was run by a very small group of individuals who used it mainly as a way of disseminating information through the Illinois Chess bulletin. It had members, but hardly anybody knew what was going on in the governing body, because it wasn't an open structure. Under the old constitution, it's unclear who's actually in charge. There is a president, but his only delineated duties are those of a chairman. And with officers scattered over the state, it robs the organization of the ability to function effectively, putting together new programs.

**BERRY:** What's being done to correct these shortcomings?

**ZACATE:** We're trying to put some structural changes into the constitution.

**BERRY:** Will Illinois have a team in the National Chess league next year?

**ZACATE:** I certainly hope so. This is one of the places where having a valid state organization could be most productive.

**BERRY:** As opposed to . . .

**ZACATE:** As opposed to a confederacy of individual organizers. The state organization has been very reluctant to commit itself to working as a unit on projects like this. I understand the reason why. We all have our own little organizations and we're trying to put on affairs for our own people. That takes money, time, energy. And there's just so much time and effort one can put into these activities when you're not getting paid for it, in most cases not even getting reimbursed for money out of your own pocket.

**BERRY:** Do you see any answers to this problem?

**ZACATE:** Documents have been prepared to make us a tax-deductible organization. Businesses and individuals will be able to contribute toward a team in the NCL and to state championship events, so we won't have to rely solely upon entry fees as a basis for their support. To me the biggest lid on growth is that - unlike most recreational activities in this country - chess has virtually no commercial support.

**BERRY:** Did the USCF make a mistake in deciding to charge for tournament notices in Chess Life and Review? I know several local clubs have cut back or eliminated their tournament schedules as a result.

**ZACATE:** It was counter-productive, particularly the requirement that the fee be sent in ahead of time. Making the local organizer

(Continued on Page 16)



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