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# Chess on the Rise at Seattle U

**George Burquest, Staff Reporter**

One of the world's oldest games, Chess has seen a resurgence in popularity over the last several years. With 14 boards set up in the heart of the Student Center, the Seattle University Chess Club (SUCC) hosted the 2024 Seattle Collegiate Rapid Chess Championship, the biggest tournament ever on Saturday, Feb. 24. Participants ranged from first-time tournament players to international masters, primarily hailing from Seattle U, the University of Washington (UW), Seattle Central College and Seattle Pacific University. However, the tournament was open to all members of the public.

The tournament was set up in a Swiss bracket, meaning every player was guaranteed five games, and there were no knockout rounds or eliminations. The games were played with a 10+0 minute time control, which made for exciting and fast-paced games. The unrated section, ideal for intermediate players, had 18 participants, while the rated section was made up of 10.

The tournament had a \$5 entry fee, and cash prizes were allocated to the top three finishers in each section. Local chess player Kurt von Laven won the unrated section with a perfect score of 5.0, and international master Alexander John Costello, finished first in the open section with a score of 4.5. (Costello's only draw came against SUCC's co-president Andrew Fletcher, who finished in third place).

Slightly underprepared for the number of participants, the only delay the competition saw came before games started, when spare boards had to be found in order to accommodate every match.

Fletcher, along with being co-president of the SUCC, is also a fourth-year computer science and business double major. He knew that he wanted to host something at Seattle U before he graduated.



Jordie Simpson

2024 Seattle Collegiate Rapid Chess Championship's first round of matches.



Mid-match moments during the 2024 Seattle Collegiate Rapid Chess Championship hosted by SU Chess Club on campus. (Jordie Simpson)

“I posted a lot on Instagram and Discord in order to spread the word, trying to get as many people to compete as possible,” Fletcher said, also noting collaboration with the chess clubs at UW and Seattle Central helped bring things together.

In terms of the setting on the second floor of the Student Center, it was a very casual and welcoming atmosphere.

Observing the dynamics between participants, it was clear that there was a common passion for the game as well as an inherent camaraderie at play. After many of the matches, players on both sides of the board would commiserate about where they might

have blundered or lost their advantage, often with the person who won offering tips and insights as to where the best move might have been.

Parker Betz, a fourth-year kinesiology major and co-president of SUCC, has been playing for around 15 years, competing in tournaments since he was a kid.

“I started the SU Chess Club two years ago. I realized we didn’t have one already and couldn’t believe it,” Betz said, highlighting the strong sense of community the club has aimed to foster. “I’ve found that the way to grow a college chess community is to appeal to the casual players.”

Looking at the turnout for the tournament, the unrated section saw a much larger pool of players.

“We had a lot of people who signed up and this was their first tournament ever,” Betz said, emphasizing the value of being introduced to the game. “Here at SU chess club, one of our biggest goals is getting people exposed to chess, that’s why we have our meetings right here on the second floor of the Student Center, (11:00 a.m.-1:30 p.m.) Tuesday and Thursday, so anyone can stop by.”

For Betz, despite playing competitively in grade school, he had largely quit during high school and only came back to the game during the pandemic. In fact, from 2020 to today, chess has boomed in popularity, thanks to a combination of shows like *The Queen’s Gambit* and the rise of chess content on platforms like Twitch and YouTube.

Betz was able to find a community playing online and watching popular creators like GothamChess, rediscovering his passion for the game along the way.

Franz Keller, an environmental engineering student at Seattle Central, stood out at the tournament on Saturday due to the tripod he had set up behind him. Similarly finding an interest in chess during the pandemic, Keller started taking chess more seriously in 2023 and has been posting chess content on Youtube for over a year—his channel is @franzluray.

“I started making YouTube videos and through that I found out that there is a huge community of people who make chess content,” Keller said.

In only his second tournament ever played, Keller might not have found the most success on the day, but was still excited by the opportunity to compete. Highlighting the casual nature of the tournament, Keller was comfortably outfitted in sweatpants and Ugg slides while playing.

Synthesizing the results of the tournament, the participation of an international master, along with first-time tournament players, captures the nature of Seattle U's chess club. Focused on being an open and welcoming community, the club has hopes for another tournament in the spring, and will, of course, continue their bi-weekly meetings at the heart of the Student Center.