

NM Chess Champions – GM Jesse Kraai, Part I

Jesse Kraai, born May 6, 1972 in Santa Fe, is the best chess player ever from New Mexico. True he has "only" won the New Mexico Championship seven times, six fewer than Stephen Sandager, but he is the only New Mexico native to achieve the International Grandmaster title. He became a Grandmaster in 2007. No other New Mexico player, native or otherwise, has even achieved the International Master title.

Kraai won the 1987 National Junior High School Championship, tied for first in the 1988 National High School Championship, and won the Denker Tournament of High School Champions in 1989 and 1990. He won the New Mexico State Chess Championship seven times in 1989, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007.

Kraai has played in the U.S. Chess Championship five times. No other New Mexico player has played in the U.S. Championship even once. While he has never been in contention for the championship, his results have been good for such strong competition - 2002 (5-4), 2003 (4.5-4.5), 2005 (3.5-5.5), 2008 (4-5) and 2010 (4.5-4.5).

Kraai has won tournament games from each of the following U.S. Chess Champions:

- GM Joel Benjamin (Champion in 1987, 1997 and 2000)
- GM Alex Yermolinsky (1993 and 1996)
- GM Alexander Shabalov (1993, 2000 and 2003)
- GM Hikaru Nakamura (2005, 2009, 2012 and 2015)

In playing through Kraai's games, I have to say he plays mind bogglingly complicated chess. The following game against GM Yermolinsky is a prime example. Even if you don't look at the notes, you just have to play through this game. It's amazing!

Kraai, Jesse - Yermolinsky, Alex, 1-0
EBCC FIDE Swiss, Round 5
Berkeley, California, 12/19/2005

English Opening

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. c4 White transposes from the Reti to the English. 2... g6 3. Nc3 d5 4. cxd5 Nxd5
5. Qa4 Bd7 6. Qc2!/? White invites Black's next move.
[More typical is 6. Qh4 Nxc3 7. dxc3 Nc6 8. e4 e5=;
or 6. Qb3 Nb6 7. d4 Bg7 8. Bf4 O-O=]
- 6... Nb4!/? This "gains a tempo," but it forces White's queen to a better position.
[A good alternative is 6... Nb6 7. d4 Bg7 8. e4 O-O=]
7. Qb3 c5 8. Ne4 Qa5!/? Very aggressive, but at the same time Black leaves his kingside

vulnerable.

[A safer alternative is 8... Qb6 9. a3 (9. Nfg5 f6 10. a3 (After 10. Qf7? Kd8 White's rook on a1 is hanging to the knight fork and his knight on g5 is hanging to the pawn. He cannot defend both) 10... fxc5 11. axb4 Qxb4 12. Qc3 Qxc3 13. dxc3 b6 14. Bxc5=; 9. Qc3 f6 10. Nxc5 e5 11. Nxd7 Nxd7 12. a3 Nc6 13. e3 e4 14. Nd4 Nxd4 15. Qxd4 Qxd4 16. exd4 f5 17. d3 exd3 18. Bxd3 Bg7 19. O-O O-O 20. Bf4 Bxd4 21. Rad1 Be5 22. Bc4 Kh8 23. Rxd7 Bxf4 24. Rxb7 Rfb8 25. Rxb8 Rxb8 26. b3 Bd6 27. a4 Bb4 28. Rd1 Re8 29. Kf1 a5 30. g3 Kg7 1/2-1/2, Socko, Monika (POL) 2465 – Toma, Katarzyna (POL) 2259, Warsaw (Poland) 1/12/2010) 9... N4a6 10. Qc3 Rg8 11. e3 Bg7 12. Qc2 Bb5 13. d3 Nd7 14. Bd2 h6 15. Be2 f5 16. Nc3 Bc6 17. d4 cxd4 18. Nxd4 Bxd4 19. exd4 Qxd4 20. Be3 Qf6 21. O-O-O f4 22. Bd4 e5 23. Rhe1 exd4 24. Bxa6 Kf8 25. Nb5 bxa6 26. Nxd4 Bd5 27. Qc7 Rg7 28. Nc2 Qc6 29. Qxf4 Kg8 30. Re3 g5 31. Qd4 Nb6 32. Rc3 Qg6 33. Ne3 Be6 34. Qe5 Rd7 35. Rxd7 Nxd7 36. Qd6 Nb6 37. Qe7 Qf7 38. Qd6 Rc8 39. Rxc8 Bxc8 40. Qxh6 Qxf2 41. Qxg5 Kf8 42. Qc5 Kg8 43. Qg5 Kf8 44. Qc5 Kg8 45. Qg5 Kf8 1/2-1/2, Socko, Monika (POL) 2434 - Lahno, Kateryna (UKR) 2488 , Dresden 11/25/2008 Olympiad (w)]

9. Nfg5!? Yermolinsky has thrown down the gauntlet and Kraai gleefully picks it up.

[9. a3 N8c6 10. Qc3 O-O-O 11. b3 Bg7 12. Qxg7 f6 13. Rb1 Bf5 14. axb4 cxb4 15. Qf7 Kb8 16. d3 Bxe4 17. dxe4 Qa2 18. Bf4 e5 19. Rc1 exf4 20. Qxf6 Rhf8 21. Qa1 Qxb3 22. h4 Qe6 23. h5 b3 24. hxg6 hxg6 25. Rh7 Qd6 26. Qc3 Qb4 27. Qxb4 Nxb4 28. e3 Nc2 29. Ke2 fxe3 30. fxe3 a5 31. Ne1 b2 32. Rb1 Nxe1 33. Rxb2 Nd3 34. Rbxb7 Ka8 35. Ra7 Kb8 36. Rhb7 Kc8 37. Rc7 Kb8 38. Rcb7 Kc8 39. Rc7 Kb8 40. Rcb7 Kc8 41. Rc7 Kb8 1/2-1/2, Wells, Peter K (ENG) 2504 – Kristjansson, Stefan (ISL) 2444, Calvia (Spain) 2004.10.24]

9... N8c6!? Rather than waste time defending, Black goes for rapid development.

[9... f6 10. Nxf6 exf6 11. Qf7 Kd8 12. Qxf6 Kc7 13. Qxh8 N8c6 14. e3 Nc2 15. Kd1 Nxa1 16. Bc4 b5 17. Bd5 Qa4 18. b3 Qg4 19. Nf3 Nc2 20. a3 Qf5 21. e4 Qg4 22. Kxc2 Qxg2 23. Ne5 Qxh1 24. Bb2 Rd8 25. Nxd7 Bd6 26. Nf8 Bxf8 27. Qf6 Bd6 28. Bxc6 Rf8 29. e5 Qxc6 30. exd6 Qxd6 31. Qg7 Kd8 32. Qxh7 Kc8 33. Qxa7 Rxf2 34. Bc3 Qc6 35. b4 Rf5 36. bxc5 Rxc5 37. Kb2 Rd5 38. Qf7 Rd7 39. Qf4 Kb7 40. Qg5 Rd5 41. Qe7 Qd7 42. Qe4 Qc6 43. Qe7 Qd7 44. Qe4 Qc6 45. Qe7 1/2-1/2, Franco, Ocampos Zenon (PAR) 2475 - Sion, Castro Marcelino (ESP) 2315 , Salamanca 1989 It;

9... f5 may be best, but after 10. Qc3 fxe4 11. Qxh8 Nc2 12. Kd1 Nxa1 13. Nxb7 Be6 14. Qxf8 Kd7 the position is as clear as mud;

9... e6? is bad. 10. Qc3 h6 11. Qxh8 hxg5 (11... Nc2 12. Kd1 Nxa1 13. Nh7 Ba4 14. b3 Nd7 15. Nxf8 Nxf8 16. Qxa1 Bxb3 17. Ke1 Qxa2 18. Qxa2 Bxa2 19. Nxc5 Black has only a pawn for a bishop) 12. Qc3 Black is an exchange down without compensation]

10. Qxf7N Yes, this is a novelty. Amazingly in the two prior games that reached this position, White did not take the pawn!

[10. e3 Ne5 11. Bc4 (11. a3 b6 12. f4 h6 13. fxe5 hxg5 14. Bc4 Ba4 15. Bxf7 Kd8 16. axb4 Bxb3 17. bxa5 Bxf7 18. axb6 Bd5 19. Nxc5 Rh5 20. O-O Ke8 21. e4 Rxc5 22. exd5 Rxe5 23. d4 Rxd5 24. Bf4 e5 25. Bxe5 Rd7 26. Bc7 1-0, Tunik, Gennady 2476 - Yandemirov, Valeri 2488 , Naberezhnye Chelny 1988 Ch URS (club)) 11... f6 12. Bf7 Nxf7 13. Qxf7 Kd8 14. O-O fxc5 15. a3 Nd3 16. Qd5 Qa6 17. Nxc5 Kc7 18. b4 e6 19. Qe4 Be7 20. Nf7 Rhf8 21. Ne5 Nxe5 22. Qxe5 Bd6 23. Qc3 Rac8 24. Bb2 Kb8 25. Qg7 Bb5 26. Rfc1 Rc7 27. Qh6 Rf5 28. g4 Rff7 29. Qg5 Qc6 30. bxc5 Bxh2 31. Kxh2 Rxf2

32. Kg3 Qg2 33. Kh4 Qh2# 0-1, Hodgson Julian M (ENG) 2510 - Lputian Smbat G (ARM) 2540 , Moscow 1987 It]

10... Kd8 How anyone could figure out what is going on here, even a Grandmaster, is beyond me.



11. Qc4 The queen has to come back to defend the queenside. 11... Ne5 12. Qc3 Bg7 Black now threatens 13... N(e)d3+, 14. exd3 Bxc3, winning White's queen for two minor pieces. 13. Nxc5?! Kraai gets carried away. He counters White's threat with the threat of Nxb7. The problem is that Black easily stops the threat and meanwhile White has opened the c-file for Black.

[13. Kd1! solves the problem of Nd3 and also solves the potential problem of Nc2. Black is more active, but White is a pawn up and his position is solid;

13. Qb3? is bad because 13... c4 forces White's queen to retreat to d1]

13... Ke8!

[Of course Yermolinsky does not fall for the trap. 13... Ned3? 14. exd3 Bxc3 15. Nxb7 Ke8 16. Nxa5 Bf6 17. Ne4 Nc2 18. Kd1 Nxa1 19. Nxf6 exf6 20. b3 Bb5 21. Bb2 Nxb3 22. Nxb3 White has a bishop, knight and two pawns for a rook]



14. d4! Kraai sets another trap, but this time it is justified. He blocks the long diagonal, thus taking away the threat of N(e)d3, but at the same time he allows Nc2+, forking the king and rook. 14... Nc2?! This time Yermolinsky falls for it. By going after the rook, he loses both knights and much of his initiative. He probably thought he could save the knight after it captures on a1.

[14... Nec6! Removing the threat to his knight, keeping the threat of Nc2+ and introducing threats to the d-pawn. 15. Nb3 Nc2 16. Kd1 Qxc3 17. bxc3 Nxa1 18. Nxa1 Black has an exchange for two pawns. The position is roughly equal]

15. Kd1 Qxc3 16. bxc3 Nxa1 17. dxe5 Rd8 18. Bd2 White blocks the d-file, defends the pawn on c3 and prepares to run the king over to win the knight. **18... Bxe5 19. Kc1 Rf8!?** Allowing the knight fork on e6 in an apparent attempt to save the knight, but it is not clear that it works.

[A good alternative is 19... Rc8 20. Nxd7 Bxc3 21. Bxc3 Rxc3 22. Kb2 Rc2 23. Kxa1 Kxd7 Black is still down a bishop and knight for a rook, but the rook on the seventh gives him good chances.]

20. Nd3 Kraai decides to keep it simple rather than go in for unclear complications. He wins the knight, but if he had accepted the challenge, he might have done even better.

[20. Nge6!? Bxe6 21. Nxe6 Rxd2 22. Kxd2 Rf6 23. Nd4 Bxd4 24. cxd4 Rc6 25. g3 Rc2 26. Kd3 Rxa2 27. Bg2 Black has restored material equality, but White's pieces come to life and it is still not clear that the knight can escape from the corner without a loss of material]

20... Bh8 21. Kb2 b5 Black aims to play b4, diverting White's knight from the defense of f2.

[But more active is 21... Rf5 22. Kxa1 Rc8 23. Kb2 Rb5 24. Kc2 Ra5 Black wins the a-pawn because defensive tries at best give White equality. 25. e4

a) 25. Nc1 Bxc3! 26. Bxc3 Rac5 27. Kd2 Rxc3 28. Nd3 Rc2 29. Ke3 Rxa2=;

b) 25. Nb4 Bxc3! 26. Bxc3 Rxc3 27. Nd3 Ra5 28. Kb2 Rb5 29. Kc2 Ra5= White has to allow a draw by repetition because defending the a-pawn with the knight will allow R(5)c5 winning the bishop on c3;

c) 25. Kb3? Rxc3! 26. Bxc3 Rxc3 27. Kb2 (27. Kb4? b6 28. Bf6 Bxf6 29. Ne5 Bxe5 30. a3 a5#) 27... Rxd3 Black wins;

d) 25. Kb2 White has nothing better than. 25... Rb5 allowing a repetition 26. Kc2 Ra5=; 25... Rxa2 26. Nb2 Black only has a rook for two knights, but his pieces are much more active]

22. Kxa1 b4 23. Nxb4



23... Bf5? Yermolinsky plays actively by attacking the bishop on d2, which in turn defends the c-pawn. But he has a surprise awaiting him.

[23... Rxf2 Is also active and immediately wins a pawn]

24. Nd3 Bxd3 Now, to win the f-pawn, he has to give up the bishop pair. **25. exd3 Rxf2** Black appears to be doing well. He threatens Rxd2. The only way to avoid losing material is to play

Be1, but then Black has a trick up his sleeve.



26. d4!! Surprise! Kraai ignores the threat to his bishop and calmly closes the long diagonal. Taking the bishop on d2 will cost Black his rook on d8. Being down a bishop, knight and a pawn for a rook, and seeing no plausible route to counter play, Yermolinsky resigned.

[Not 26. Be1 ?? 26... Rb8!! The trick. 27. a4 Giving his king some luft. (27. Bxf2?? Bxc3#) 27... Rfb2 28. d4 Rb1 29. Ka2 Rxe1 30. Bb5 Rxb5 31. Rxe1 Rxe5 Black wins]

[...]

[If 26... Rxd2 then 27. Bb5 Kf8 28. Ne6 Kg8 29. Nxd8 and White's extra knight wins]

[1:0]

Matt Grinberg, 6/3/2016

NM Chess Champions – GM Jesse Kraai, Part II

I have been putting together these articles about the New Mexico Champions largely from my Chess Assistant database. With a few exceptions, like Jesse Kraai and Ruben Shocron, it does not have many games for our New Mexico Champions. It occurred to me recently, "Why not look on the NMCO web site." Duh! This game and the photo come from the January, 2006 edition of Desert Knight. The comments are my own.

The two titans of New Mexico chess, 7 time Champion Jesse Kraai and 13 time Champion Stephen Sandager, square off in this game. The game opens quietly with the English. Steve makes a couple of positionally questionable moves, which against a lesser player might not have amounted to anything. Jesse, with his Grandmaster prowess, brilliantly exploits his opportunity and ends the game with a tactical flourish.

Kraai, Jesse - Sandager, Stephen, 1:0
New Mexico Open, Round 5
Albuquerque, New Mexico, 10/30/2005

English Opening

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 d5 This is a little unusual.

[Black typically plays for a King's Indian Defense. 3... Bg7 4. d4 O-O 5. e4 d6 6. Be2 e5 7. O-O (7. dxe5!? does not win a pawn. 7... dxe5 8. Qxd8 Rxd8 9. Nxe5?! (9. Bg5 Re8=) 9... Nxe4 10. Nxe4 Bxe5 Black is better due to the pressure on the b2 pawn) 7... Nc6 8. d5 Ne7 The space advantage gives White a slight edge]

4. cxd5 Nxd5 5. Qa4 c6!?

[He can avoid problems with 5... Bd7 6. Qh4 (If 6. Qd4!? as in the game, then simply 6... Nf6 equalizes) 6... Nxc3 7. bxc3 Bg7 With a better center, White has the edge]

6. Qd4 Nf6!? He had a difficult choice, but of the three ways to defend the rook, allowing the trade of queens, leaving his king stuck in the center is worst.

[6... f6 7. e4 e5! 8. Nxe5 Nxc3 9. Qxc3 Qe7 (9... fxe5?? 10. Qxe5 Qe7 11. Qxh8 Qxe4 12. Kd1 White wins) 10. Nf3 Qxe4 11. Be2 Nd7 12. O-O Bb4 13. Qe3 Qxe3 14. dxe3 White has the better center and better development;

6... Rg8 7. e4 Bg7 8. Qa4 Nb6 9. Qa3 The loss of his kingside castling privilege makes things awkward for Black]

7. Qxd8 Kxd8 Sandager probably thought that, with the queens off the board, his king being in the center would not be a problem. Kraai demonstrates otherwise.



8. d4 Nbd7 9. e4 h6 The fact that Black finds it necessary to make this move to keep White's knight out of g5 shows he is already in trouble. What he really needs is to develop and get his king out of the center, but it is hard to come up with a good move.

[Here's another try in which Black never gets off the back rank. 9... e6 10. Bf4 Bb4 11. Bd3 c5 12. Ke2 cxd4 13. Nb5 Ne8 14. Nbx d4 Bc5 15. Bg5 Be7 16. h4 h6 17. Be3 Bf6 18. Rac1 a6 19. Rc2 Ne5 20. Nxe5 Bxe5 21. f4 Bc7 22. e5 h5 23. Be4 Rb8 24. Rd1 Ke7 25. Nf3 b6 26. Bc6 Bd8 27. Nd4 Ng7 28. f5 Kf8 29. f6 Bxf6 30. exf6 1-0, Soln, Primoz (SLO) 2470 - Novak, Gorazd (SLO) 2237, Ljubljana 1998 It (open)]

10. Bd3 N e6 11. Ke2! White leaving his king in the center is not a problem because it does not impede his development and Black has no way to attack. **11... Bg7 12. Rd1 Ke8** The king feels jittery. **13. Bf4 b6 14. Rac1 Bb7 15. e5!?** The only dubious move White makes in the game. He wants to clear e4 for his knight, but is it worth making his dark square bishop bad and giving d5 to Black?

[Putting the bishop outside the pawn structure before the e5 push looks better. 15. Bd6]

15... Nh5?! Oh no! He misses his chance. The knight goes the wrong way.

[15... Nd5! Now White has a choice between exchanging on d5, which robs him of control over e4, or retreating the bishop. Either way Black has a decent position. 16. Nxd5 (16. Bg3 Nb4 17. Ne4 Bf8 18. Bb1 Nd5; 16. Bd2 a5 17. Ne4 Bf8) 16... exd5 17. Be3 Rc8]

16. Bd2 Bf8 17. g4 Ng7 A sad place for the knight compared to d5, where it could have been.

18. Ne4 Kd8 19. Nd6! He is willing to allow the doubled, isolated d-pawns because he knows that as the position opens up, Black's poorly placed pieces will not be able to defend, let alone attack. The pawn on d6, though seemingly weak, cannot be successfully exploited. Meanwhile it restricts Black's position. **19... Bxd6 20. exd6 Rc8**

[Going after the d6-pawn is no better. 20... Ne8 21. Ne5 Nxd6 22. Nxc6 Bxc6 23. Rxc6 Ne8 24. g5 With the bishop pair, better development and control over the c-file, White is close to winning]

21. Ne5 Nxe5 Fixing White's pawn structure does not seem to make sense, but at least it frees up his position a little.

[He could just play defensively, but after 21... Ke8 22. Be4 Nb8 he is tied up even worse]

22. dxe5 Kd7 23. h3 c5?! Black makes a desperate bid for activity, but this makes White's task easier.

[If he plays defensively, he could hold for a while, but he is doomed in the long run 23... Rb8 24. Rc3 Ne8]

24. **b4!** He plays to open the position for his more active pieces. **24... cxb4** This allows a nice combination, but he can't hold the pawn on c5 anyway.

[24... a6 25. **bxc5 Rxc5** 26. **Rxc5 bxc5** 27. **Rc1** Either the c-pawn or the h-pawn has to drop;

24... **Bc6** 25. **bxc5 bxc5** 26. **Ba6!** The c-pawn must drop (Not 26. **Rxc5?? Bf3** 27. **Kxf3 Rxc5**)]

25. **Bb5 Bc6**

[25... **Kd8** 26. **Rxc8 Bxc8** 27. **Rc1 Ne8** (27... **a6** 28. **Be3 axb5** 29. **Bxb6 Kd7** 30. **Rc7 Ke8** (30... **Kd8** 31. **Re7#**) 31. **Rxc8 Kd7** 32. **Rxh8** White wins) 28. **Rxc8! Kxc8** 29. **d7 Kd8** 30. **Bxh6!** White wins]

26. **Rxc6 Rxc6** 27. **Bxc6 Kxc6**



28. **Bxh6!** There is no way to both save the knight and stop the pawn from queening. Black resigned. [...]

[28... **Rxh6** 29. **d7 Rh8** 30. **d8=Q Rxd8** 31. **Rxd8 Kc7** 32. **Rg8** and the knight is lost anyway]

[1:0]



Photo: Jeff Burch

Jesse Kraai and Steve Sandager analyze, post mortem. The position is after 9. d4.

Matt Grinberg, 6/15/2016