

"In my weeks of preparation for the National High School Chess Championships, I had reviewed openings, polished my endgame technique, and practiced my tactical vision. Columbus would be my final scholastic tournament for the MLWGS Green Dragons Chess Team, so I really pushed myself to do well in both the blitz and the main tournament.



Isaac Steincamp (center), takes on his 7th round opponent on his way to an 18th place finish.

For those unfamiliar with competitive chess, blitz is a rapid game, where each side has only five minutes to think for all of their moves. I've always been a slow player myself, but over the past couple years, I've used rapid play to help me warm-up for major tournaments with some success. On Thursday night, upon shaking hands with my first opponent, I didn't really know what to expect. My first two games were simple, and didn't demand serious calculation on my end. I wasn't really thinking about how I performed, but after seven games, I had managed a perfect score of 7-0 and was ranked 6th overall at that point. Vastly outmatched, I lost the next three before bouncing back, winning the final two games. I managed 18th place overall in the blitz competition, far above my expectations.

Going into the main competition on Friday, I really put a lot of pressure on myself to perform, making me somewhat nervous going into my first round. My opponent was able to get an advantage from the very beginning of the game, so I had to force myself to patiently claw back into the game to earn the win. The second round proved to be the most difficult game of the whole weekend. My opponent, only an elementary school student (who finished 4th overall in the main event), quickly outplayed me, getting significant pressure on my position. I was able to hold, but as the game finished, I was on the short end of the stick, tired as the game took nearly five hours, finishing close to midnight. Saturday proved to be an interesting day for me. Still tired from the night before, I had to play more aggressively than normal to ensure shorter games while still earning the point. I finished the day with 2 wins and a draw, totaling 3.5/5. Competition in the other sections was really heating up as well. Our U1600 was place first going into that evening, with brilliant first day performances from **Shreya Shetty** ('17, Henrico) and **Charles Yang** ('17, Henrico). Those two really drove the team from the beginning of the tournament, and their studies were proving them well going into the last day of the competition.



Isaac Steincamp (center) and David Normansell (right) play games with kids at the March 2015 Free Chess Clinic

I played a National Master from Texas in my sixth round, and despite all of the distractions, I had managed to reach a strong position out of the opening, and was so close to playing one of my best games, but in the most critical moment of the game made an error and lost quickly. Disappointed, I went into my last scholastic game of my career, determined to be a winner. The game wasn't my best, but the complications in the position were enough to out-maneuver my opponent and win the game. My score of 4.5/7 was enough for me to place top 100 in the Championship section again, but I would be remiss not to mention the U1600 team's 5th place finish. Charles Yang finished 10th in his section without losing a game at a score of 5.5/7, and Shreya Shetty, **Matthew Normansell** ('17, Henrico), and **Jeffrey Song** ('17, Henrico) all finished with solid results to round out the team's top finishers. The U800 team also played exceptionally well. Despite only having a three-man team, **Vishnu Pulavarthi** ('17, Henrico), **Eric Campbell** ('18, Chesterfield), and **Trey Johnson** ('18, Richmond) helped MLWGS place 19th in the country, with Having been on the MLWGS Chess Team for four years, I have to say that both coaching and playing with my teammates have really pushed me to become better at chess. In just the past year, my studies with the team helped me reach the 99th percentile of all chess players in the country, and bolster me to an all-time high ranking of 34th best 18 year old in the United States back in February. I am without doubt that the support of my friends on the chess team have helped me analyze positions at a much higher level, and are in a large part why I've seen improvement in my play each year.

What is more encouraging, however, is the effort that this team puts into their own improvement and their involvement in the chess community. Never in my eleven years of playing chess have I seen a group more motivated to improve than the MLWGS Chess Team. This year I coached the team on Tuesdays after school in Room 111 (we still meet), and throughout the year, each player improved significantly. Furthermore, the members of this club really were passionate about working with younger players in the Greater Richmond area. On top of practices, each of the members of our club made an effort to volunteer at our free chess clinics throughout the year, or our other chess events we ran throughout the year. In my time at Maggie Walker, Chess Club has been the most impressive student run club I've seen, and has emerged has a major staple of the Richmond Chess Community.

If you want updates from the MLWGS Chess Team, visit our Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/MLWGSCHESS>.