

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s

Chess in the Northwest flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. This could be seen in the rise in the number of tournament players and an overall increase in playing strength, especially at the top. This included not only two-time World Championship Candidate Yasser Seirawan, but fellow Grandmasters Duncan Suttles and Peter Biyiasas plus International Masters Eric Tangborn and John Donaldson. Previously the only national caliber players were Grandmaster Arthur Dake, Grandmaster Emeritus Elmars Zemgalis and Senior Master Olaf Ulvestad – all of whom developed as chess players in the 1930s and 40s. This jump in the number of internationally titled players was a long overdue and welcome development, made possible in part by a larger pool of players and increased opportunities.

The top players were not only male. Alexey Root, then going by her maiden name of Rudolph, became the first woman from the Northwest to play in the U.S. Women's Championship in 1981 at the age of 16. She would go on to play in another nine Championships, winning the title in 1989. Root also played on the 1990 U.S. Women's Olympiad team. Another Seattle player, Mary Kuhner, participated in the 1987 U.S. Women's Championship and made an even score.

The 1970s and 1980s were an up and down period for *Northwest Chess*. The editorships under Rob Hankinson (early 1970s) and John Braley (mid 1983-84) were two of the golden times for the magazine with plenty of great articles, cartoons and annotated games from the likes of Duncan Suttles, Bruce Harper, Jonathan Berry, Yasser Seirawan, Eric Tangborn and many others but the magazine almost collapsed in the first part of 1983 after an over ambitious push to fancier paper without adequate financial resources. Only a great effort by many individuals averted the end of a monthly tradition dating back to 1947.

The following photos, rescued and preserved by John Braley the past thirty years, feature many of the best players and important chess organizers and directors of the 1970s and 1980s.

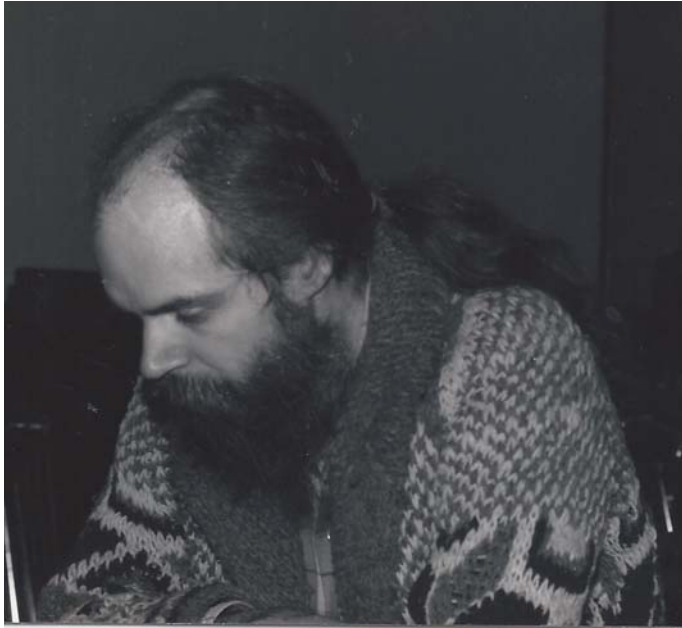


Bruce Bailey

Bailey served as WCF President but he is best remembered for his work on the Northwest Rating system. Under his stewardship it appeared monthly a decade before the U.S.C.F. offered similar service.

Photo: WCF President Bruce Bailey, with Robert Karch looking on.

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



John Braley – National Master

Braley was a three-time Washington State Champion: 1971, 1983 and 1986 (with Matt Edwards). His score in 1971 was 7-0, one of four perfect scores in the series dating back to 1932 – and against the strongest opposition of the group.

He was Editor of *Northwest Chess* in 1983-84, and served in many posts for the Washington Chess Federation in five different decades from the late 1950s to the early 1990s.



James Bricher – National Master

The strongest of a large chess playing clan (his father, uncle and brother were all tournament players), National Master James Bricher of Cottage Grove won three Oregon State Championship titles (1975, 1979 and 1981). The first was in 1975 when he was 18 years old.



David Collyer (1951-1992) – Expert

Collyer was added as a last minute replacement to the 1973 Washington State Championship but surprised everyone including himself by finishing with an even score. This result by the Wenatchee native, then studying at Central Washington University, remains one of the best ever in a state championship by a player east of the mountains.

David and his son NM Curt Collyer are the strongest father and son combination in the history of chess in the Northwest. An annual tournament honoring Collyer in his adopted hometown of Spokane has been held every year since 1993.

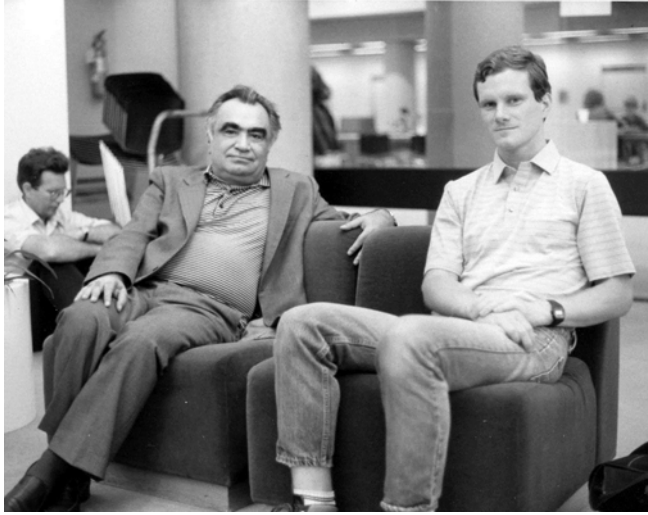


Randy Dean – National Master

The strongest player ever to come from Olympia, where he started playing in the mid to late 1960s, Dean was second in the 1975 Washington State Championship.

Photo: Randy Dean playing Yasser Seirawan at the Washington State Championship in 1974.

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



John Donaldson – International Master

Washington State Champion in 1979 and 1980, Donaldson served as Associate Editor of *Inside Chess* for its duration from 1988-2000.

He earned two GM norms in 2002-2003 and had peak ratings of USCF 2601 (May 1990) and FIDE 2467 (2004). Donaldson has served as U.S. Olympiad and World Team Captain 17 times from 1986 to the present (2015).

Photo: IM Nikolay Minev (left) and John Donaldson (right) at Paul Keres Memorial in 1985.



Ralph Dubisch — FIDE Master

Dubisch was editor of *Northwest Chess* for over four years. He shared 4th place with IM Leon Piatsetski in the 10-player 1990 West Seattle International that had an average USCF rating of close to 2400. This performance pushed his FIDE rating over 2300 and earned him the FM title.



Matt Edwards – National Master

Edwards was Washington State Champion in 1986 (with John Braley) and 1988. He had several other good results during this period, finishing no lower than third in the event from 1990-1992.

(Photo taken in 1984.)



Paul Eggers – National Master

Raised in Tacoma, National Master Paul Eggers was one of the top junior players in the Northwest in the late 1960s. He played in two Washington State Championships, finishing third in 1989. Eggers worked for Yasser Seirawan's *Inside Chess* magazine for several years and has written several well-regarded short stories on the game.

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



Ray Fasano (1945-1986) – National Master

Fasano tied for first in the 1976 Washington State Championship with Yasser Seirawan and Viktors Pupols but lost the playoff. This was the closest a player from Eastern Washington (Fasano was living in Tonasket) has ever come to winning the state title.

Born in New Jersey, Fasano was a talented junior. He placed 4th in the 1961 U.S. Junior Open in Dayton, Ohio, at the age of 15, but didn't play much in his late teens and throughout his twenties. His best results were equal first in the 1974 Oregon Open with Arthur Dake and Yasser Seirawan and equal first with John Donaldson in the 1981 Keres Memorial.

He died in a motorcycle accident in June of 1986 in Seattle.



Robert Ferguson – National Master

Ferguson was the 1984 and 1987 Washington State Champion and is the current Attorney General for Washington State.

(Photo taken in 1984.)

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



Eugene Fomin – Expert

Fomin tied for first in the 1975 Challengers Cup (and won the playoff against Neil Salmon).

He played in the 1976 Washington State Championship.

Photo: Eugene Fomin (left) with David Rupel (right).

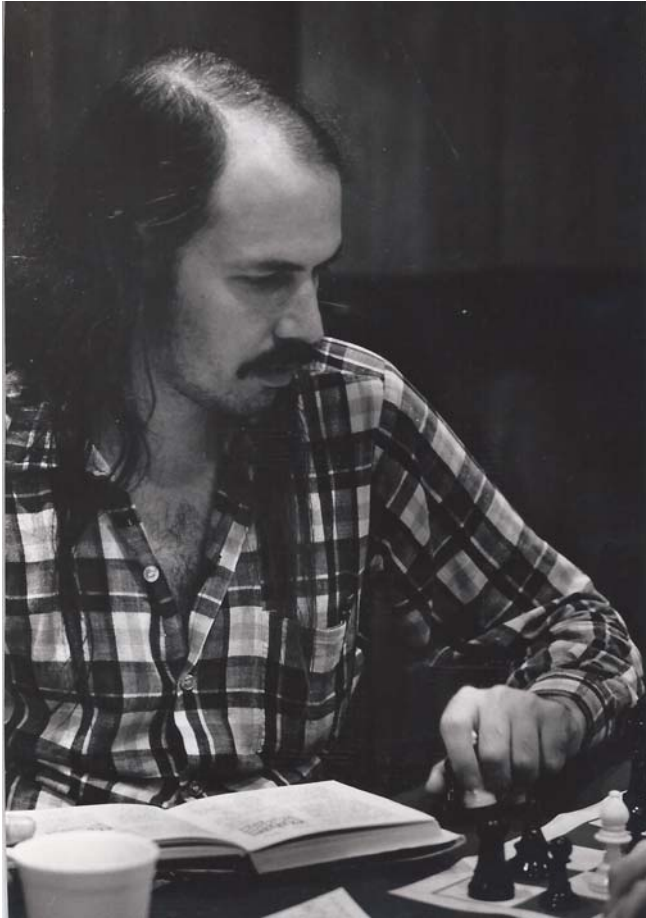


Mike Franett (1941-2004) — National Master

Franett was Washington State Champion in 1970, 1972 and 1973.

He was also Editor of *Inside Chess* for its entire run (1988-2000) – close to 10,000 pages.

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



John Grefe – International Master (1947-2013)

Grefe lived in Ashland and Eugene in the late 1970s and played in several tournaments in the Northwest in the 1980s. He is best known for tying for first in the 1973 U.S. Championship with Lubosh Kavalek.

(Photo taken in 1983.)



Elmer Hovermale (1931-1998)

Hovermale first started playing in the Tri-Cities in the 1950s but is best known for his efforts helping the Tacoma Chess Club in the 1970s to 1990s. Hovermale's Eldoro Distributors were the publishers of Yasser Seirawan's two-set *Flash Tactics* which came out in the early 1980s (NM David Vest was the editor).

Photo: Hovermale watching a game, with Neil Salmon on the right.

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



Robert Karch (1930-2010)

Karch is number two on the list of longest serving editors of *Northwest Chess*, behind only Dan Wade, with seven years of service (83.75 issues).

He was originator of the Northwest Rating system in the late 1950s.

Karch opened a full-time chess center, called the American Chess Service, in Seattle, which was active from 1973 to 1974. This was the second such establishment in the Northwest, the first being Olaf Ulvestad's Seattle Chess Center in the late 1950s where Michael Franett and John Braley first cut their teeth.

(Photo taken in 1979.)



Mark Lawrence

Lawrence was a prodigy in his youth and one of the strongest blitz players at the Last Exit cafe in Seattle in the 1980s.

In the photo, Lawrence is shown with a young Duane Polich.



Photo (left to right): Mark Lawrence, Mark Ryan, Ken Tomkins and Michael Spiegel in front of The Last Exit.

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



James McCormick — National Master

McCormick is a seven-time Washington State Champion (1960, 1965-69, 1981).



James McFarland – National Master

McFarland was an Expert when he played in the 1977 Washington State Championship. He later became a strong master reaching a peak rating of 2387 USCF while living in Sacramento where he still resides.



Bill McGeary – National Master

Bill ("Bomber") McGeary, a frequent participant in Washington State Championships in the late 1970s and early 1980s, tied for first in 1982.



Photo: IM Nikolay Minev (left) and John Donaldson (right) at the Paul Keres Memorial in 1985.

Nikolay Minev
— International Master

Minev settled in Seattle in 1983 after a distinguished career in his native Bulgaria which included winning the national championship three times and representing his country in six Olympiads including Havana 1966 where he played Bobby Fischer.

Minev played a pioneering role in the Encyclopedias on Openings and Endings published by Chess Informant and continued to contribute to them after settling in the Pacific Northwest. He has authored close to 30 books and served as the editor of both *Shakmatna Misl* and *Northwest Chess*. Among IM Minev's students over the past three decades are former state champions Kent Pullen and Robert Ferguson.



Vladimir Pafnutieff (1912-1999)
— National Master

Born in Russia, Pafnutieff immigrated to the United States in the late 1920s settling in San Francisco. He quickly became one of the best players in California, a position he occupied for over 40 years. In the early 1970s Pafnutieff and his wife moved to Kirkland where she opened a Russian restaurant. During the next few years he played in three Washington State Championships; his best finish was a share of second in 1974. In the late 1980s Pafnutieff published a primer/best games collection entitled *How to Create Chess Combinations* which uses his games to teach tactical play.

(Photo taken in 1974.)

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



Larry Parsons – National Master

Parsons has tied for first or won outright 18 Idaho State Championships.



James Perry

Perry was a regular columnist for *Northwest Chess* in the late 1970s with his column *Za Rubezhom*, where he translated the latest offerings from the famous Soviet weekly 64. His translations were featured in *Chess Scandals* by Edmondson and Tal, a book on the 1978 Karpov-Kortchnoi match.

Photo (at 1975 Washington State Championship): Duane Polich, Yasser Seirawan, Randy Dean and James Perry (hand on chin).

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



Philip Peterson

Peterson is one of the longest serving editors of *Northwest Chess* (47 issues) and has received numerous awards for his chess photography.

Photo from 1981 Washington Junior Closed: Front row (L to R) - Bob Ferguson, Paul Zurybida and Jerry Prothero; Back row - Bill Phipps, David Archer and Philip Peterson. (Photo was possibly taken by Bob's dad, Murray Ferguson.)



Duane Polich – Expert

Polich has held multiple offices in the Washington Chess Federation for over 40 years and organized numerous tournaments. He operated a short-lived chess facility near the Seattle Space Needle in 1974.

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



Kent Pullen (1942-2003) – Expert

Pullen was Washington State Champion (with Jeremy Silman) in 1985.

(Photo taken in 1984.)



Viktors Pupols – National Master

Viktors (“Vik”) Pupols was the Washington State Champion in 1961, 1974, 1978 and 1989.

He has played in a record 43 state championship events dating back to 1954 where he placed second behind the all-time winner of most titles (9) J.L. Sheets. The second place in his debut was one of 13 times Pupols was the bridesmaid between 1954 and 1992.

Many of his games from the Washington State Championships can be found in *Viktors Pupols: American Master* by Larry Parr.

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**Alexey Root (née Rudolph) –
National Master**

Root was the first woman from the Pacific Northwest to play in the U.S. Women's Championship, playing in ten events (1981-84-86-89-90-91-92-93-94-95) and winning in 1989.

She represented the United State in the 1990 Women's Chess Olympiad and 1990 Women's Interzonal.



**David Rupel –
National Master**

Rupel played in the 1984 and 1985 Washington State Championships. He continues to play actively both locally and internationally and at age 63 his USCF rating of 2107 (after the 2013 Washington Open) is not much more than 100 points from his all-time high.

Photo: Eugene Fomin (left) with David Rupel (right).

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



Neil Salmon – National Master

Salmon was Washington State Champion in 1982, 1990, 1991, 1994 and 2002.

His peak USCF rating was 2341 in February 1990, a remarkable achievement for someone who played 99 percent of his chess in the Seattle-Portland corridor in the 1970s to 1990s.

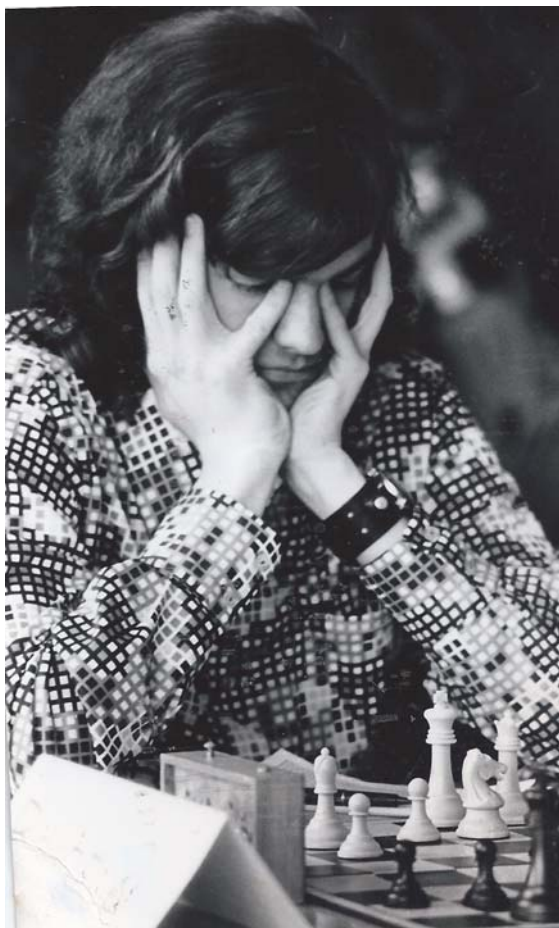


Mike Schemm – Expert

A strong Expert with both Oregon and Washington ties, Schemm first started playing in the mid-1960s and quickly became one of the top juniors in the Northwest. He played in every Oregon State Championship from 1966 to 1977 except 1971 when serving in the military. His best finishes were =1st but second on tiebreak in 1975 and second in 1969.

Schemm has done well in senior events the past few years. Highlights have included a tie for 3rd in the 2009 U.S. Senior with 4.5 from 6, good for a 2300 USCF performance, and placing second among all American competitors in the 2010 World Senior where he performed over 2200 FIDE. Not bad for a competitor in his sixties!

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



Bill Schill - FIDE Master

Schill, an expert at poker and backgammon as well as chess, was Washington State Champion in 2000 and 2001.

(Photo taken in 1974.)



Michael Spiegel – Expert

Spiegel played in four Washington State Championships in the mid to late 1970s with his best result a tie for third in 1979.

(Photo taken in 1974.)

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



Yasser Seirawan — Grandmaster

The most famous chess player in Northwest history, Yasser Seirawan's numerous accolades include Washington State Champion (1976 and 1977); World Junior Champion (1979); four-time U.S. Champion (1981, 1986, 1989, 2000); twice a Candidate for the World Championship (1985 and 1988) and 10-time member of the United States Chess Olympiad team winning numerous individual and team medals.

Seirawan served as Publisher of *Inside Chess* from 1988-2000.

He is the inventor of the variant Seirawan Chess.

Photos: Yasser and Washington State Championship trophy, 1976 and 1977.

Also see photo for James Perry.



Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



D. Leo Stefurak — National Master

Stefurak is from Seattle and played in the 1974, 1976 and 1977 Washington State Championships, but he achieved his best results out of state, primarily in Minnesota. His peak USCF rating was 2365.

Photo from 1977 Washington State Championship.



Duncan Suttles — Grandmaster

Suttles holds the Grandmaster title for over the board and correspondence play.

He represented Canada in eight Olympiads and won his national championship in 1969. Suttles won both the U.S. and Canadian Opens in 1973.

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



Eric Tangborn – International Master and Correspondence International Master

Tangborn's accomplishments include Washington Junior Champion in 1976, Washington State Champion in 1978, 1st at Oregon Open in 1978, Tie for 2nd in U.S. Junior Open in 1978 and 1st at Keres Memorial in Vancouver, B.C. in 1982.

His peak FIDE rating was 2455.

(Photo taken in 1977.)



Gordon Taylor – FIDE Master

Taylor, who lived in Vancouver, British Columbia, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, just missed becoming an IM (he made two norms).

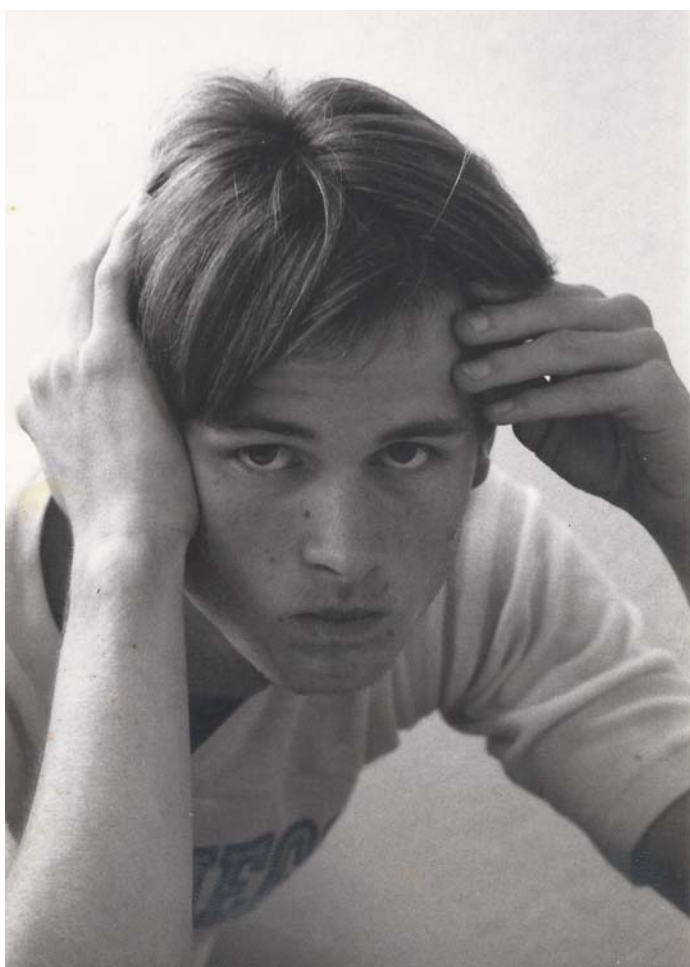
(Photo taken in 1981.)

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



David Thompson

Thompson was the author of an excellent article on chess trivia which was published in the July 1983 issue of *Northwest Chess*.



Ken Tomkins – Senior Master

Tomkins placed second in the 1984 and 1989 Washington State Championships.

He achieved a 2400 rating late in his short-lived career by winning the 1989 Washington Open.

Tomkins founded the Internet Language Company in Seattle in 1995, which together with family obligations, cut short his chess career.

(Photo taken in 1984.)

Chess in the Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s



Johnny Walker – National Master

Walker was Washington State Champion in 1975, and second in 1973 and 1974.



Dennis Waterman – Senior Master

Like Duncan Suttles, Dennis Waterman was born in San Francisco but moved at an early age to Myrtle Point. He is one of the highest rated players in the history of Oregon Chess reaching a peak rating in the low 2400s USCF, but had bad luck in the state championship never winning the title in four tries.

Waterman is better known as a world class poker player.

(Photo taken in 1983.)

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Jack Woehr

Woehr served as cartoonist and games editor for *Northwest Chess* from 1979 to 1980.



Richard Wood (1958-2003) – National Master

Wood was an eight-time Oregon State Chess Champion between 1984 and 1999.



Robert Zuk – FIDE Master

Zuk is one of the strongest players in the history of British Columbia. He won many Northwest tournaments in the early 1970s including the 1971 Park Haviland Invitational ahead of Biyiasas, Harmon, Pupols and Franett, etc. He is famous for the “Winter of Zuk” in 1970-71.

To quote Yasser Seirawan:

Bob came down from British Columbia and dealt the top players of the Pacific Northwest over 120 consecutive games without a win. That included a streak of over 40 consecutive victories (no draws) for Bob. Zuk was famous for building up his position to an absolute maximum before attempting to find a winning plan.

Credits:

Research/writing—IM John Donaldson

Photos—collected by John Braley and given to Donaldson
(see introduction)

Layout—J. Eric Holcomb

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