

About MACA

The Massachusetts Chess Association is an educational non-profit organization whose purpose is to promote chess in Massachusetts and represent the interest of chess players within the state to the governing body of chess in the United States, **The United States Chess Federation (USCF)**.

As part of its role as a state organization, MACA has programs in place to support the existing chess community as well as promote chess among schools and the general public. Highlights of these programs are:



Providing at least four major tournaments each year:

Massachusetts Open (State Championship)
Massachusetts Game/60 Championship
Greater Boston Open
Pillsbury Memorial



Running a scholastic program, which consists of a series of tournaments to determine the state's scholastic champions as well as "warm up" tournaments throughout the year. Free boards and sets are provided to schools and clubs through MACA's **Living Memorial Chess Fund (LMCF)**.

Quarterly publication of the award winning *Chess Horizons*, a journal of regional, national and international chess news and features.

Promotion and development of chess in correctional institutions through our Prison Chess program.

We hope you will chose to join MACA and enjoy the benefits of membership while knowing that you are helping to promote chess throughout Massachusetts.

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IN THIS ISSUE

Letters/6

Review Digest/8

Caveat Emptor

Mark Donlan, Stacy Angle, Lou Mercuri

2004 NorthEast Spring Getaway/12

Report, Photos, and Games

Severine E. Wamala

Why Play Gambits?/15

Test your Tactics in Combat Situations

Steve Lopez

The First Step to the Crown/19

An Important Stage in Karpov's Development

IM Dr. Josef Vatnikov

Haste Makes Waste/22

Instructional Game Analysis

Randy Bauer

64th New England Open/23

Report and Games

George Mirijanian

Games From Recent Events/26

Game Analysis and Photos

Larry Christiansen and Hal Terrie

A True Lover of Chess/34

Interview with Harold Dondis

George Mirijanian

Cover Photo by Tony Cortizas:
Boston Globe Chess Columnist Harold Dondis

The Study of Master Games/38
MACA's 75th Anniversary
Jeremy Silman

Amos Burn: A Chess Biography/39
Book Excerpt
Richard Forster

Chess Opening Miniatures/43
Naming and Shaming Rubbish Performances
Gary Lane

1964 U.S. Open/44
A Retrospective
George Mirijanian

2004 CJA Awards/45
Horizons Nets Five Awards

USCF News/46
Eynullayeva Wins 1st Annual
Susan Polgar Invitational

Past Massachusetts Champions/47
1932 - 2004

Club and Tournament News/48
All the Chess that's Fit to Print

Details of Future Events/55

New England Club Directory/61

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Harold B. Dondis: A True Lover of Chess

Interviewed by George Mirijanian



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Harold B. Dondis of Belmont, MA, who this year is celebrating his 40th year as the Boston Globe's chess columnist, is the "Dean of New England Chess Journalists." A testimonial dinner in Harold's honor will be held Friday evening, November 12, at the Boston Globe, 135 Morrissey Boulevard, in the Dorchester section of Boston. The event is open to the public. Details of the testimonial may be found on the MACA Website: MassChess.org. Discounts on tickets will be available to MACA members. Mr. Dondis was interviewed on August 10 at his Belmont home by MACA Vice President George Mirijanian.

George Mirijanian: When did you start as the Globe's chess columnist?

Harold Dondis: It started the year of the 1964 U.S. Open in Boston. In the early 60s, I had a date with a girl who asked me if I wanted to join a poetry club in Dorchester. I thought it was a big laugh, so I said "Sure, I'll go." So I went. And they had a class on modern poetry. And the moment I opened my mouth, they put me in my place. They were a great group. One of them in the group was Jim Burgess, who was writing the Globe chess column.

I became very friendly with him. And I became very interested in modern poetry. And in the course of it, Burgess introduced me to Harry Lyman. I hadn't played chess for many years. I never played tournament chess. So I started to play at the Boylston Chess Club in Boston. I have never been a great player, but I really love the game. So that's how I got involved with Harry Lyman. And at one point [in the early 1960s] I became president of the Massachusetts State Chess Association, Inc. [after 1971 to be known as the Massachusetts Chess Association.]

I used to have lunch with Jim Burgess every day. He had an office near my law office. Unfortunately, Jim had a heart attack. He died suddenly [on July 24, 1964]. And

there was really nobody to write the column at that time who was a good writer. So I got in touch with the Globe and, though my law firm represented the *Boston Record* [the Globe's competition], they agreed that I could do the columns. So I started in. I really always thought of it as a local column and I just tried to get the news and to comment on chess.

At one point, John Curdo started to write game annotations for me. So I said, "John, why don't you do them?" And he did and he was a marvelous annotator. So I was lucky to have a very good annotator. And later, when John left [as annotator in March 1998], I picked up Pat Wolff. I used to drive him around to tournaments. I was his chauffeur when he was 10 years old. He was a very talented kid. Some thought he would be American champion. I wasn't so sure. But he did prove to be champion. And he does the annotations now. He's excellent. As I said, I'm not an impressive player, but I love the game. I'm 81. I still play it. I love it. I even had a heart attack during one game. It doesn't bother me. I love it so much.

GM: When did you learn how to play chess?

HD: I learned it in boys' camp when I was 10 years old. I used to play checkers with one of the counselors and I used to beat him. So he taught me chess so he could beat me. Then I found a friend in Rockland, Maine. We played in the library every day for a long while. But I never played tournament chess. I never realized the great depth of the game.

GM: Do you remember your first rated tournament?

HD: Yes, I lost all my games. I think I haven't been much better since, George.

GM: I understand you've beaten some strong players during your long playing career. Is that right?



Photo: Stephen Dann

At the 1979 New England Open in Boxborough

HD: Occasionally. I did beat Bobby Fischer [in a simul in Fitchburg on March 2, 1964].

GM: Can you tell me something about that event?

HD: The place was mobbed. I was a little fellow and a guy grabbed me and then spectators and players put me on their shoulders. It was a fluke game. It was a 19-mover. Fischer was experimenting with a gambit by Weaver Adams. I knew the line by Larry Evans and Fischer made a mistake and I trapped his bishop. He was very gracious in resigning. I could never do that again. So once in a while, you do hit it. You beat somebody much stronger. I've beaten Jim Bolton [at the 1972 Central New England Fall Open in Leominster]. I even beat John Curdo once or twice. I drew with Petrosian in a simul [at the Boylston Chess Club in 1982]. But I'm not much of a player.

White: Fischer, R.

Black: Dondis, H

[C27] Fischer tour simul Fitchburg, 02.03.1964

1.e4 e5 2.Nc3

In tournaments Fischer almost always employed the Ruy Lopez, occasionally dabbling with the King's Gambit and Evans Gambit/Two Knights Defense. Here Bobby, perhaps to honor the memory of the late great New England master Weaver Adams, author of *White to Play and Win*, adopts his pet opening against 1...e5.

2...Nf6 3.Bc4 Nxe4 4.Qh5 Nd6 5.Bb3 Nc6 6.d4

The main move here is 6.Nb5 which leads to long forcing play after 6...g6 7.Qf3 f5 8.Qd5 Qe7 9.Nxc7+ Kd8 10.Nxa8 b6. Fischer sidesteps this with a sideline that Adams tried for awhile before going back to 6.Nb5.

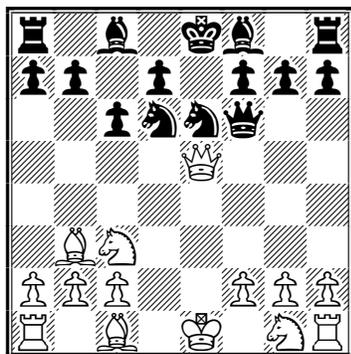
6...Nxd4 7.Nd5 Ne6 8.Qxe5 c6

Sidestepping 8...Be7? 9.Bh6! 0-0 10.Nxe7+ Qex7 11.Bxg7.

9.Nc3

ECO, Vol. C, 2nd Edition gives 9.Nf4 Qe7 10.Nf3 Nf5 11.0-0 Ned4 12.Qxe7+ Bxe7 13.Nxd4 Nxd4 with a clear advantage to Black (Adams).

9...Qf6



The first edition of *ECO*, Vol. C, ends here with the remark that Black has a clear advantage, according to GM Larry Evans. 10.Qxf6 gxf6 11.Nge2 Nf5 12.g4 Nfd4

13.Nxd4 Nxd4 14.Be3 Nxb3 15.axb3 d5 16.Rxa7 Rxa7 17.Bxa7 Bxg4 18.Bd4 Be7 19.Kd2 c5 0-1
(*Chess Horizons*, April 1979, p.31)

In *A Legend on the Road* it is reported that Dondis wrote: "Fitchburg, site of the simul, is a mill town which, perhaps due to organizers like George Mirijanian, was quite wild about chess. As I recall, Fischer had asked for as many boards as possible. There was not enough room for the overflow crowd and it was so enthusiastic about seeing a possible world champion that, when Fischer erred against me, and a move later graciously resigned, the crowd bore me out of the room on its shoulders! I've never seen that in chess."

GM: What about the 1964 U.S. Open in Boston? Did you play then?

HD: Yes, I did. I remember that's when the U.S. Charitable Trust started [later to be named the U.S. Chess Trust]. Ed Edmondson asked me how to start a charitable group. I drew up a trust and Edmondson was the sole trustee. We started with \$1. But what Edmondson did was to use the trust as a conduit to finance the Lone Pine tournament in California. And the IRS was auditing the USCF at the time and they hit upon the trust and claimed that the USCF was financing prizes. So they pulled the charitable exemption. So that's when I stepped back in.

Edmondson asked me to become a trustee. We lost the exemption. But then, after I got on the trust, Edmondson resigned. The USCF voted to put the trust out of existence because the American Chess Foundation was a bit concerned. I declined to do it. Finally, the USCF appointed a trustee named Phil Coolidge. He came to the meetings of the trust and agreed that it was a beneficial thing. And we kept it going. But the favorite charity then was the Fan Adams Foundation. Fan Adams was a marvelous man.

GM: What is your opinion of the state of chess today?

HD: The computer has given it a big stimulus. No ques-

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tion about it. But chess is not a spectator sport. I think it's always going to be a struggle. The people are going to play it because they love it. That's my attitude toward the game.

GM: What about FIDE?

HD: FIDE depends on who's got the money. I don't care. You can talk about morality or honor or whatever you want, but the person with the money will control FIDE. If FIDE wants to rate every player in the world, it would even try to absorb the USCF rating system. I predict the person with the money will control FIDE. Maybe I'm wrong.

GM: Your column was canceled in early February 2001. What are your thoughts about that action?

HD: That was a fluke. The *New York Times* had bought the *Boston Globe* and the Times wanted to cut expenses. So they cut the column to preserve their own staff. They cut the independent contractors. I was one of them. Look, the Globe prides itself as being a very intellectual newspaper. And in that light, it was the wrong move.

I think the Metrowest Chess Club in Natick - Larry Eldridge, a lot of people - wrote letters to the editor complaining. So they called me back. [The column was reinstated in late June 2001.] I didn't know what I wanted to do. So I called Pat Wolff and he decided he would like to resume his work.

GM: What are your thoughts about Fischer and his problems?

HD: If they brought him back and he had a jury trial, I really question whether they could convict him. However, he has never paid his income tax. And if they wanted to indict him for that, I suppose they could. But, I wish they would let him alone. Of course, he has made some very terrible statements about the U.S. and very racist statements. They might consider him a little bit of a danger. But I really think that he's a pathetic fellow. He's a very angry man. I think he's gotten worse and worse as he gets older.

GM: Tell me something about your professional background.

HD: I have been a corporate lawyer since 1945. I have had a long career. I used to read U.S. Supreme Court cases during my chess games. I've read them all for 60 years.

GM: Didn't you once argue orally before the U.S. Supreme Court?

HD: Yes, I lost a case 9-0 [in 1976. The case was Federal Energy Administration et al. vs. Alogonquin SNG Inc. et al.] That's hard to do. It was concerning the oil tariff - the validity of the oil tariff. But we eventually got it removed. But I still think it was a bad case. It was quite an experience.



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Dondis studies a position at a Getaway Tournament

GM: Tell me about your personal background. When and where were you born?

HD: I was born [on Oct. 1] in 1922 in Rockland, Maine, a little town of 9,000. I was brought up there. It was a nice place to be brought up in. My father owned a motion-picture theater. And I can say that I saw every movie that played there. I did usher for a time at nights. But it was during the Depression, so I stopped so that my father could hire other people to work. But anyway, it financed me to go to college - Bowdoin College. After Bowdoin, I went to Harvard Law School [graduating with a law degree in 1945].

GM: What is chess to you?

HD: Chess has a special meaning to me. I've studied chess problem-solving on an amateurish basis. I've written two books on it. None of them have been published. For me, it's a fascinating field.

GM: What are your thoughts on computers in chess?

HD: I always felt that computer would beat human beings. My opposition to it was based on the idea that I thought human beings were being exploited. The USCF originally made it mandatory to play the computer, which, I thought, was denigrating. So I supposed it. I felt it cheated and ran things on a separate board. But it has stimulated the game, like the Man vs. Machine games - which, by the way, are a little bit phony, phony because the Man gets the software in advance. What I would like to see is Woman vs. Machine.

GM: What do you attribute to the success of the Metrowest Chess Club?"

HD: It's a good organization, starting with Warren Pinches and later with Mark Kaprielian. Kaprielian brought in organization. Of course, the two deserve the

Chess Horizons

lion's share of the credit. It's an amazing club, an absolutely amazing club.

GM: Any thoughts on some of New England's top players?

HD: I remember Jackie Peters [an IM and longtime chess columnist for the Los Angeles Times]. Peters beat me the first time he played me. He checked me on the back rank from his first rank and won a rook and the game. That persuaded him that he could play good chess.

GM: What about the return of IM Jim Rizzitano after an absence of 15 years?

HD: Rizzitano loves the game. He's playing at approximately the same strength as he did before. It's very hard to go forward. I wish Jim luck. He's a very popular fellow.

GM: Your thoughts about the late Harry Lyman.

HD: Harry was a saint. He and I went to Moscow together to watch the first half of the Karpov-Kasparov match in the mid-1980s. We roomed together. All we saw were draws.

years living in California] and she told all about Fischer – how she sat with him on the floor for an hour trying to make him realize what was at stake. She felt that he would play. Bill Lombardy and Cramer wanted to start a telegram campaign urging Fischer to play. So I called up Steve Dann in Worcester and told him to start a telegram campaign. I think that it probably helped out some.

GM: Any other memorable events you remember?

HD: The US-USSR match in New York. Bronstein took 45 minutes on his first move. I asked him about it later when I was in Moscow. He said: "Well, you know chess is a long voyage. You can go here; you can go there. You have to decide. You know, I could have done it in advance [i.e. choosing my opening move]. But sometimes you don't." He took 45 minutes on the first move and won the game. What can you say?

GM: What can you tell me about your longtime friend, John Curdo, the "Dean of New England Chess Players"?

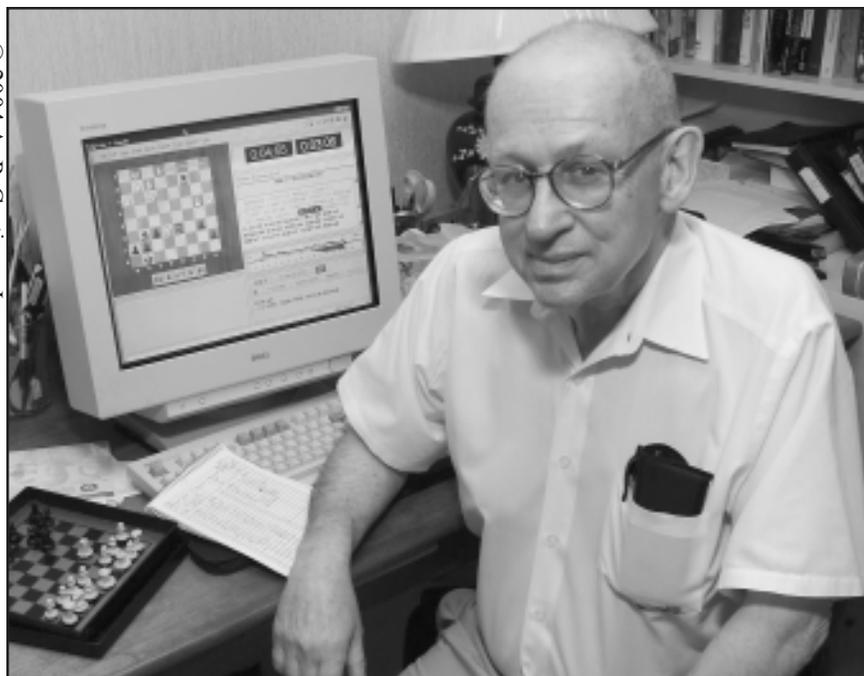
HD: He's a very bright fellow. He has won over 700 tournaments. His misfortune has been the influx of Russian émigrés. If it hadn't been for them, I think he would have

well over 1,000 tournament wins. He's a great player. I saw him beat Robert Byrne. I've seen him beat Pal Benko. He's a very resourceful player.

GM: And finally, are you optimistic about chess in this country?

HD: Yes, I'm optimistic. I think people love to play and will continue to do so. But it won't be enormous. I don't see any chance of that. Kasparov has tried to make it a spectator game. But it won't be. Perhaps with Fischer Random, the younger generation may take to it so they would not have a disability in the opening. I can't see that far ahead. We'll just have to wait and see.

GM: Harold, many thanks for the interview and best wishes for a happy 82nd birthday on October 1. May all your future tournament games be successful.



Dondis in his "chess center"

GM: What about the 1972 Fischer-Spassky match in Reykjavik?

HD: I was staying across the room in the hotel from Fischer. I was working with Fred Cramer and [*Life* magazine writer] Brad Darrach. Cramer asked me after the first game to come over and act as his attorney. I was attorney for Cramer, not for Fischer. Fischer once came into our room. He was angry to see us there. He tried to lock us in. He looked at me and said: "Who's this guy?" I met there Lina Grumette [who nurtured Fischer during his

Shirov & Kramnik Launch Websites

Kramnik's official website has become active: <http://www.kramnik.com>, just in time for his World Championship match in September.

Alexei Shirov has a new webpage, together with GM Alfonso Romero and IM Javier Sanz from Spain. The address is <http://www.shirovonline.com>, with pages in both Spanish and English.