

# NEWSLETTER

## Mississippi Chess Association

12/31/2017

### Officers:

President: Mark Nicholas

Vice President: Jeff Hensley

Treasurer: David Mooney

Newsletter Volunteer: Jerold Sit

# **An Interview with Mark Nicholas, 2017 President of the Mississippi Chess Association**

**It was on a December Saturday in Petal, MS** at a Taco Bell that I had the pleasure of having a nice chat with Mark Nicholas. For those unaware, the MCA organized a Winter Speed Chess Tournament at the International Checkers Hall of Fame, a unique facility in a location far away from city life. This is the country that many of us are so used to, country roads, lots of pine trees, a small church every ten miles or so, plenty of rich dirt farm land, and the expectation of few places to dine. And yet, Petal had a Taco Bell. I had no idea Petal was growing, my mistake. After we placed our order and received our food, we settled on table and a distribution of sauces and napkins. So, we began a discussion about chess in MS while squeezing Diablo sauce on the various combinations of seasoned ground beef, refried beans, shredded cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, and flour tortillas. Mark and I are kindred spirits; we both love to eat and to play chess. Here is a Q&A summary of our brief time together:

Question: Mark, at the recent MS Closed State Championship, you held a Business Meeting for the MCA. Tell me about that.

Mark: We have some new blood to chess in MS, which was welcomed. We still are pursuing a higher interest in chess in MS. I'm excited to see what John Salisbury brings to the Tupelo area. Of course, Jeff Bullington has a lot going on in Franklin county with the schools and with the chess center. I know you are working with the Capital City Club at The Outlet Mall in Flowood. The MSCA has continued their activity, holding some scholastic tournaments. Vicksburg is holding steady, which is good to see. And, I'm happy Zach Couvillion is organizing an upcoming tournament.

Question: What is going on with scholastic chess?

Mark: A lot! There's been a lot of activity over the Scholastic State Championship and how to handle that situation. It was decided at the Business Meeting that the MCA would step back into some coordination and support. The whole idea is not to conflict with anyone or any organizations like the MSCA, but rather to support any and all.

Question: So, what has been decided on the Scholastic State Championship?

Mark: The Board decided on stepping back in and promoting official MCA sponsored events. We want to ensure there is no scheduling conflict with a major USCF sponsored event, nationally. Also, we are pushing for more alignment with national standards, such as working to notate games, having longer time controls, etc. We just want to make sure our kids are best prepared when they play others both in MS and outside of MS. A few have commented to me about how our kids either play too fast or aren't used to the demands, especially at the national venues. We need to ensure our kids are better prepared.

Question: Ok, lets move on to adult issues What was discussed about the issue of having an open or a closed State Championship.

Mark: Well, anyone can play in the State Championship, including those in high school and below. We want that to be clear. The question is if we want to make it an open tournament like we did a few years ago, when Alex (King) won the tournament and Craig (Saurage) became State Champion, being the highest finishing MS player. Or, do we limit the tournament to just MS players and not let those from out of state to play. There are pros and cons to each approach, but we are still leaning toward a closed tournament in 2018, just like we are doing this year (2017).

Question: You mentioned about some activity with Zach Couvillion down in Picayune.

Mark: Yes, I want to help him out and make sure we support what he is trying to do with chess in that part of the state. It's an upcoming tournament in February. Stay tuned for more information, soon.

Question: You elected some board members?

Mark: Yes. I took on another term as President, David (Mooney) and Jeff (Hensley) have elected to remain as Treasurer and VP, respectively. We added John Salisbury as Secretary. (As of this writing, John has resigned and the role of secretary will be absorbed among the board members.)

Question: I talked to David about the financial condition of the MCA. Your thoughts?

Mark: We are a little down on funds with about \$1200 in the bank. David feels good with at least \$2000 minimum, but the account will be replenished with upcoming activities and new plus renewal memberships. We invested money in this year's Petal tournament to garner Grand Prix points. Dave Ross won that one, and we plan on future investments to promote the game. We definitely want to invest to attract more and better play.

Question: Any final thoughts?

Mark: Yes, we have a Summer Slam planned for 2018, likely in June and NOT on Father's Day. So, stay tuned to this communication and to the website. We plan on some updates to the website as time permits. I want to let everyone know that the MCA is for and supportive of everyone involved with chess in Mississippi. We are here to support y'all.

Contact Mark at [mark@thug.net](mailto:mark@thug.net)

# How Chess Saved My Eyesight

By Jerold Sit

**I'm sitting in the back pews at church**, and I notice my vision isn't like it was. This was four years ago. Nothing to worry about. I've worn contacts for over 30 years, so it's time to see the optometrist. Over the years, I've had to change prescriptions, going to contacts with higher diopter numbers. First it was minus five, later it was minus seven in both eyes. Most recently, it was minus seven in the left and minus eight in the right. Obviously, the right eye was getting worse.

My visit to the optometrist wasn't exactly "eye opening." My right eye was definitely worse, now a minus twelve, but even with contacts I couldn't read the eye chart. This means I can't even read 20/200. If memory serves me, I can't see at 20 feet what normal eyesight sees at 200 feet. I'm blind in that eye.

What does this mean? In searching for answers, I did know that I have a defective area in my right eye, a macular issue. Maybe like me, you have heard about all of the television advertisements about macular degeneration. Did I have that?

What about my golf game? Would I be able to play again? Could I even hit the ball? Scratch that. I couldn't hit the ball that well, before! What about my chess game? Certainly, I could do that with one eye. I mean, even blindfold chess players can do it. But could I? I've never had much success with "seeing" the board in my head. I can see e4 and that's about it. E4 is a light square, isn't it? Nope, It's dark! Well, maybe I can't even see e4!

Doreen, my wife, suggested I go to a medical doctor . Go see an eye doctor, a medical doctor. Go see an ophthalmologist, and I went. The test results confirmed my poor eyesight. The laser test computer mapped out my macular issue like a topographical map. I had some kind of lamellar hole, whatever that is. The other eye didn't, because It looked like a smooth hill, and the right eye didn't. The right side had a small section dug out of the hill side, like someone took a hand shovel and removed a small part. No big deal, right? The doctor gave me the technical analysis with some options of doing nothing being the best one. He mentioned cataract to the technician that steadily typed into a nearby keyboard. My return appointment was in a month.

I returned a month later to the eye doctor, doing the same routine. I sat in the same waiting room. I sat near the same chair. They dilated my eyes. The laser computer mapped out my eye topography like a PGA tour caddy, plotting a green. I saw the doctor while his assistant typed away as the doctor peered into my eye. I asked him what can be done, and the doctor said the exact same words as the initial visit. It was as if he hit the "play" button on a recorder and I heard the diagnosis by playback. It was word for word, which I thought was strange.

'Come back in six months, he said. By the way, did I mention that I was still blind in my right eye?

I was running out of contacts, so it was time again to go see my local optometrist. I see a competent optometrist, and he confirms my right eye blindness. I can't make out any letters on the eye chart. I know there are letters on the wall. I just can't read them; they are too blurry. With correction, I can see 20/20 in my left eye and well, the right eye just has a soft contact lens in there to help make out a few shapes. He mentions that I'm starting to get some cataract development in both eyes with the right eye coloration more than the left. 'What does this mean,' I asked? " It means your right eye has a caramel tinge in color to it," he said. Oh, ok I guess. What does this mean, I asked? "It means at some future time, you may need to have surgery and replaces those lenses. Your right eye sees things with a brownish-orange tint," he said. Will that fix my vision? He said it probably wouldn't, so when the left eye needed surgery, it would be time to do it. I had to save the vision in the left eye. It was all I had. I got my prescription for contacts and I was on my way. Did I mention that I'm still blind in my right eye?

It's time for my third appointment to the ophthalmologist. I went through the same routine, just another day and a different time. I had my eyes dilated, I sat with my chin in the laser mapping machine. I heard the same diagnosis, and I heard the exact same words! Am I seeing "Dr.Parrot?" It there a large, colorful bird in the examination room repeating the same words over and over? Those words: lamellar hole, macular, cataract, need to monitor, just watch it. That was the best option. Did I mention that I'm still blind in my right eye?

What am I going to do?. Obviously, nothing. Well, just get on with my life. Try to serve God, Try to take care of my family, Try to play chess as much as I can. And that is what I did to the best of my abilities. You do move a little slower because of depth perception issues. So, move on and play chess, right? I remember last December in 2016 that I met others at our location in the food court of The Outlets of Mississippi in Pearl. It was time for the Capital City Chess Club to meet up and set up some boards. We had some new faces that day. Christmas break was here and students and adults were out of school and work. A young man and his dad showed up. Both of them being of Asian ethnicity, I naturally welcomed them since I to am of Chinese descent. The young man said his name was David Huang and that he used to be a decent scholastic player. Dave Ross shook hands with them too, so I surmised that Dave knew them well. Obviously, Dave had coached David, and this was probably the former MS State Champion in Chess!

David Huang sat down to play a game, and I played pretty well, solid. David made good moves, but nothing like playing Stockfish. So, I wasn't intimidated. But at the end of the middlegame, I had a dark square problem and David had the dark square bishop. David's dad Bo, also commented about my dark square weakness. While playing, I remember asking Bo where he worked and he mentioned UMMC. I suspected he was a doctor there, but didn't ask. I had to destroy his son! Enough with the pleasantries! David exploited my dark square weakness and being a pawn down, I couldn't stop the oncoming push, so I resigned. I told Dave Ross about

my loss to David Huang, and about asking Bo what he did for a living. Dave told me Bo was an eye doctor. Ok, neat. He also told me that Bo became a really strong chess player by taking his son to numerous chess lessons and picking up a better game by just listening. He said that Bo is probably about 1800 if he played tournaments. There are some really, smart folks in chess, and I wondered if Bo's son was going to follow his dad's footsteps and be a doctor as well. So many Asian children go down that path.

Well, even in a losing battle, I can still play chess with one eye, and of course with the obligatory reading glasses. I get to meet folks. I get to build relationships with others in small groups, both with other church members and with other chess players. I can still see my girls growing up. I can still see my beautiful wife, who now comments that those are words from a partially blind man, so lots of laughs there. Life goes on. But did I mention that I'm still blind in my right eye?

Four years after seeing the medical doctor, the ophthalmologist, and hearing the exact same words, a diagnosis with no solution, my wife suggested that it was time to see him again. I had cancelled my last visit to him, mainly for efficiency reasons. Why pay a fourth time for the same thing? Why didn't I bring a tape recorder? Hit the record button on my phone app? Then I could save him the effort. I could just hit "play" and hear the same thing. Why don't I just do that instead of paying a few hundred dollars? (I had no idea that retina specialists see hundreds of patients daily and probably can't keep up with who they see, but couldn't they remember to change up the words a bit, be less repetitive?) "Well you need to get your eye checked," my wife said. For what? I'm blind in that eye. That doctor doesn't do anything but repeat what I have already heard. Why bother? "Doesn't that affect your overall vision," she asked? Sure, but you adapt. You live with it. What am I going to do, go back to "Dr. Parrot"? "Well you need to do something," she said. Did I mention that I have a really good wife, and that I'm still blind in my right eye?

Like most husbands, I do listen to my wife. I just don't necessarily act on it, immediately. But a chance opportunity arose. Maybe it wasn't chance. God is in control of all, right? I am a Christian a deacon at First Baptist, by the way.

My family was out eating at Mr. Chen's in Jackson, and I ran into Bo Huang and got to meet his lovely wife. This was a good opportunity to briefly chat with Bo as I remembered what my wife wanted me to do, but I wasn't going back to "Dr. Parrot." I asked Bo if he was an Ophthalmologist, and he said he was. So, I asked him if maybe I could see him about my eye issue. He said, "Sure." He would be glad to see me.

I contacted Bo and set up an appointment with the UMMC office. Bo saw me, and within a few seconds of peering into my right eye, he said, "You have a large cataract and you need surgery." Wow. Finally, I had a diagnosis with a solution! Surgery followed two weeks later and I could see again in my right eye. It wasn't perfect but it was 20/30, way better than 20/200, aka blind! My left eye surgery followed about fifteen days later, and now I see 20/20 in the left eye and 20/30 in the right eye. I can see again! I no longer need contacts. I no longer need cleaning

solutions! Bo told me that my chess rating is going to go up 200 points because I can now see the right side of the board! We will see, I thought. Maybe not, if I have to play David Mooney with the black pieces for a fifth time in a row. But nevertheless, I'm thrilled! Did I mention that I can't rationalize how for four years I have been blind in my right eye?

All I needed was God's providence, Bo Huang's skill, knowledge, and ability, and Chess.

What can be learned from all of this? One thing for sure, is that relationships matter. We are meant to be social people, and chess folks are some of the most talented people on the earth. So, get out and play. Fritz 16 will always be there. Another thing, is that loved ones care for you and you should listen to them, especially us men listening to our wives. We listen to them all the time, right? And finally, we have to be our own health advocate. Chess requires mental and sensory function. The better shape we are in, the better we can play. Dave Ross mentioned to be that good health is worth at least 150 rating points. I'm so grateful for my wife, Dr. Bo Huang, for my coach David Ross, and for my chess friends. It's time to move up a few hundred rating points.

## DAVID ROSS IM

**The most frequent question I get asked** by people who want to improve at chess but don't have a lot of time is what can I do to improve. The most common problem holding people back is ability to calculate accurately and I am sad to inform you that most people are really bad at that. I had to do over 5000 really hard puzzles to get to a level that would allow me to become an I.M. I am not kidding when I say, at best, I have an average ability to calculate. So, what to do to overcome this incredibly common problem?

There are fantastic, tactical training tools available on the internet. Chess is similar to math and music in that if people spend 15 minutes daily it is far more effective than 90 minutes on the weekend. For people who don't like computers there are great puzzle books available. One such book I have all my private students complete is Winning Chess Tactics for Juniors. Most people hate doing this work as basically they are too lazy, and it takes an effort so few people take this advice and continue to miss simple combinations.

A totally different idea that is far less painful is to increase your general chess knowledge. This can actually be fun! Find a book of games by a player you like and just play them over trying to understand as best you can. It also helps to know some basic endgame ideas. There are possibly 25 positions that if you know about these things

and can see clearly 3 moves ahead you can get to 1800 without a doubt. It is the seeing clearly ahead that is the hard part.....

I will leave you with a funny position to consider that occurred in one of my students games recently. 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Be7 4 d4 exd4 5 Nxd4 d6 6 Qh5

diag A strange move that gives black a lot to think about. Try putting this on a board and thinking about it for 10 minutes and writing down as much of your thoughts as you can remember and I will explain it next issue. Good Luck!

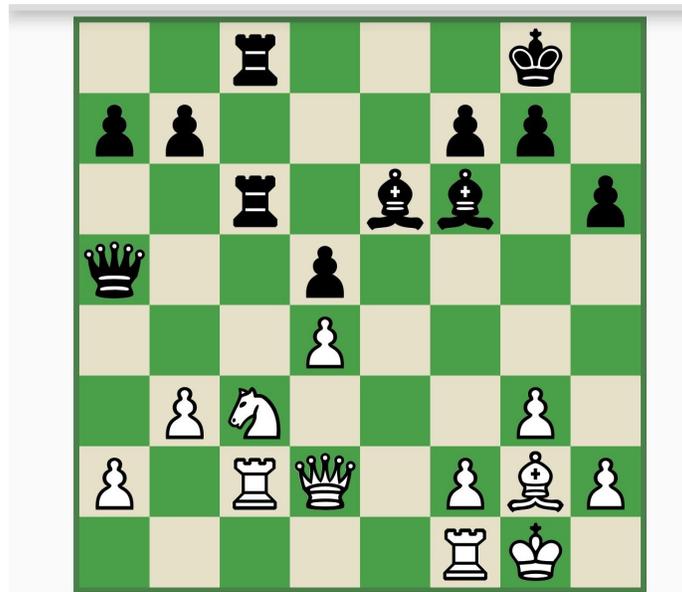


# Tactics (solution in next issue)



**White moves 1.?**

Winning Chess Tactics, Hays, p.12 #26



**White moves 1.?**

Chess Tactics for Advanced Players, Averbakh, p.52. Burn vs Marshall, 1911