

# 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.

## **ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RATES**

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# Flohr's "Little Secrets"

**IM Dr. Josef Vatnikov**

Felix Berkovich, a chess enthusiast from Boston, has been gathering information about prominent chess players for a long time. One of them was grandmaster Salo Flohr and Berkovich has amassed a sizable collection of his chess legacy.

You do know Flohr as a chess journalist, don't you?

On November 1938, the Netherlands gave the world's eight best players a warm welcome. Grandmaster Salo Flohr, then the official challenger for the world champion title, was among the participants of the great AVRO tournament. It was an anxious time as World War II was approaching. Flohr was forced to flee from his native country Czechoslovakia that had been annexed by the Nazis. He took temporary refuge with the Estonian chess star Paul Keres, who had also been invited to play at AVRO, one of the most significant tournaments in chess history.

Before their trip to Holland, the Estonian chess fans asked Flohr to tell them about all the participants and Flohr, rather than predict the tournament results, dictated to the listeners an article entitled the *Little Secrets of the AVRO Participants*, which he was going to send to *The British Chess Magazine*.

Recently, the editor of this chess magazine discovered the above letter and sent it to Berkovich. The latter asked me to comment on Flohr's remarks and since grandmaster Salo Flohr was a close friend of mine I decided to modernize and supplement his old report.

**The AVRO tournament could not be played in Germany because at least half of the participants are not pure enough.**

Flohr implied that Michail Botvinnik of the former USSR, Reuben Fine and Samuel Reshevsky of the U.S., and himself were Jews. One could clearly predict their future if they were to play in Hitler's Germany. At the beginning of the tournament, a report came from Germany about the terrible Kristallnacht (a German word

that means "Night of the Broken Glass").

The other half of the participants included Alexander Alekhine, at that time the world champion, who was born in Russia and then lived in France, ex-champions Jose Capablanca of Cuba, Max Euwe of Holland, and Paul Keres.

**Alekhine and Capablanca are the only ones (temporarily?) who did not speak to each other.**



*Salo Flohr (left) and Josef Vatnikov (right)*

In 1927, Alekhine realized his great dream and beat Capablanca in a very difficult match. Capablanca hoped to regain the chess crown, but all his efforts to play a return match were in vain. The two chess geniuses, both very cultivated gentlemen, had been antagonists for over ten years, yet during the tournament they began to speak.

More recently, a similar clash of interests arose between Vladimir Kramnik and Garry Kasparov. It seems that the newly ordained world champions often do not want to risk all that they have gained, and keep postponing a decision to fight their most dangerous rivals. Julius Caesar was right: to remain the conqueror is harder than to conquer.

**Capablanca is the oldest.**

Capablanca had the good fortune to celebrate his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday during the tournament. His game with Alekhine was on the same day. He was not in the mood for

"If you don't have your own independent thoughts you cannot be successful as a chess player." Vladimir Kramnik, Interview with Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam, in *New In Chess 2000/3*

playing and hoped to end this game in a quick draw. However, Alekhine put his opponent out of humor and inflicted on him a crushing defeat.

**Keres is the youngest.**

Despite the fact that Keres was only 22-years of age he had some brilliant successes. He first drew attention to himself by his excellent results at the Warsaw Olympiad in 1935. Keres tied with Fine for first place at the AVRO tournament, ahead of Botvinnik, Alekhine, Euwe, Reshevsky, Capablanca and Flohr. By then Keres, "The Paganini of chess," had won over 30 international tournaments.

**Euwe and Keres are the tallest.**

A Dutch journalist decided to take a photo of the tallest participants, but he photographed only their feet. The next day, his report appeared in the Dutch newspapers with the title, "What feet are doing when heads are thinking."

**Botvinnik and Keres are the only grandmasters who do not know each other personally.**

Many years later, Botvinnik wrote about his first meeting with Keres: "He was graceful and slender, with almost angelic features. He had eaten little, also had not talked much, did not smile, and was dressed very well. After the tournament, Paul's right to play a match with Alekhine became obvious. Capablanca, who dreamed that somebody would beat his enemy Alekhine, persuaded Keres not to play with him in South America where Alekhine had a lot of friends." There was a controversial question which was better: to play a world championship match once or to be the second in the challenger competitions four times? The latter was a success for Keres, so Botvinnik commended Paul's achievements.

**Reshevsky and Flohr are the shortest.**

One day, Flohr told me in a friendly way: "I often envied my tall wife; she was a relative of the well-known Russian poet Sergey Esenin. It often happened to me when we both were invited to a party and guests began to dance." Reshevsky complained that his son didn't like chess and,

because of his height, played baseball excellently.

**Alekhine is the only blond participant.**

“Alekhine’s exterior leaps to the eye when he appears in the tournament hall,” – noted Capablanca. “A blond Russian man, he was over 6 feet tall and about 200 pounds in weight.” Once I met an elderly resident from near Moscow, who had seen Alekhine when he gave a blind-fold simultaneous exhibition in 1913. A local lady could not believe that such playing was possible. “You should be ashamed of talking like that,” she said. “Alekhine is not blind. In the morning, he glanced at me with his softly radiant eyes and even smiled upon me.”

**Alekhine and Euwe played the most games (80).**

Many chess players accepted the idea that Alekhine was an invincible world champion, but they forgot that for two years he also was the ex-world champion. Euwe, the quiet and modest mathematics teacher from Amsterdam, astonished the whole world by beating the great Alekhine. After two months of intense struggle in 1935, Euwe had a one point lead. A draw in the last, 30<sup>th</sup> game, would be enough for him, but Alekhine would have to win to keep the highest title. Euwe was nervous and suddenly knocked his king over and, replacing the figure, said to Alekhine, “At any moment I am prepared for a draw.” A couple of hours later, Alekhine agreed, and pronounced loudly – “Long live the new champion!”

Euwe was at the zenith of his strength at age 34. Two years later, they played a rematch and Euwe resigned the 25<sup>th</sup> game and congratulated Alekhine: “The old and the new world champion!” The rivals always respected one another. They played about 100 games.

**Reshevsky, the wunderkind, was already playing grandmasters at the age of 6. Vidmar, one of his opponents at that time, insists that Reshevsky played better than he does now!**

When Sammy was five years old he started playing simultaneous games. Once, during wartime (WWI), a German general invited him to play chess at night. The boy won all the games. The German

general asked the lad for an opinion about his play. “You know how to wage war, and I know how to play chess!” Sammy said. When the war was over, the talented youngster set off on tournaments around Europe. He mostly played simultaneously. Among his opponents at the time was Max Euwe... At the end of 1920, the nine-year-old Reshevsky moved from his native Polish town to New York. It has been said that Charlie Chaplin once offered him a role in one of his films, but Sammy refused because of his religious convictions.

**Reshevsky is the only kosher participant.**

Samuel Reshevsky came from an Orthodox Jewish family, and he followed the Jewish religious tradition his whole life. He always covered his head with a cap, and did not play chess on the Sabbath. The latter restriction brought him a lot of trouble during chess competitions, including the AVRO tournament.

**Botvinnik and Euwe wear glasses.**

Botvinnik and Euwe were on friendly terms, but not only because both wore glasses. The two grandmasters traveled from The Hague to Moscow to participate in the 1948 world championship tournament and upon arrival the Soviet custom officers were suspicious of Euwe’s notebooks with encoded notes. Botvinnik explained that these chess variations could not be dangerous for the Soviet State, but it was possible that Soviet participants could use Euwe’s opening secrets if they were detected by the custom officers. Euwe smiled at the Soviet officials and said, “My variations are directed only against the American Reshevsky,” and the matter was settled.

**Alekhine, Fine and Flohr are professional players the others are so called ‘amateurs’.**

This was partly correct. Alekhine was a Doctor of Law; he defended his dissertation at the Sorbonne, France, in 1923. Fine was engaged in the research of psychology and, because of it, he even declined to play in the 1948 world championship tournament. Capablanca was a professional diplomat. Euwe, as a professor of math, taught university students.

Botvinnik studied problems of electrical engineering his whole life. Keres and Reshevsky were chess professionals but, like their tournament colleagues, devoted their lives to chess.

**Alekhine is the most traveled. Where has he not been?**

Travel became a nice tradition of chess life, because chess players everywhere want to see the world champion. Alekhine considered it his duty to visit every possible place on earth and spoke at least four languages: Russian, German, French, and English. Later he wrote his last books directly in English.

**Keres and Reshevsky are the only bachelors. Alekhine is the ex-smoker. None of the participants is an alcoholic.**

None of the participants could remain bachelors their whole life and some of them even married twice or thrice. Chess could not stop them from marrying. Alekhine refused to smoke and drink alcohol, as he did during his 1935 match with Euwe, because he was convinced that those vices only hinder the successful playing of chess.

**All the participants secretly hope to win “at least” first prize!**

The rising generation gained the upper hand over the older one. Fine and Keres were first. The organizers of the tournament declared Keres the winner on a tie-break and decided thus: the prizes are shared, but Keres is first! AVRO needed a winner because it was declared before the tournament that the winner would have the right to challenge the world champion.

Botvinnik was third and Alekhine, Reshevsky, and Euwe shared 4-6 places. Capablanca was seventh and Flohr placed last. The chess youth of today should know the great legacy of the outstanding chess players of the past. Salo Flohr, “the best journalist among players and the best player among journalists,” possessed a deep understanding of chess, especially the endgame, but he strove for success without any risk. The following game against the well-known Yugoslav grandmaster Vidmar may be an instructive illustration of how to use a minimal positional advantage.

**Flohr – Vidmar**  
Nottingham, 1936  
Queen’s Gambit

1.c4 e6 2.Nc3 d5 3.d4 Nf6 4.Bg5 Be7  
5.e3 0-0 6.Nf3 Nbd7 7.Qc2 c5 8.cxd5  
Nxd5 .Bxe7 Qxe7 10.Nxd5 exd5 11.Bd3  
g6 12.dxc5 Nxc5 13.0-0 Bg4 14.Nd4  
Rac8 15.Qd2 a6 16.Bc2 Qg5 17.f3 Bd7  
18.Rfe1 Rfd8 19.Rad1 Qf6 20.Bb3 Ba4  
21.Bxa4 Nxa4 22.Rc1 Nc5 23.Red1 Qb6  
24.Ne2 Nd7 25.Qd4 Qxd4 26.Nxd4 Ne5  
27.b3 Kf8 28.Kf1 Rxc1 29.Rxc1 Nc6  
30.Nxc6 Rc8 31.Rc5 bxc6



White has a better pawn structure and his rook is more active than the enemy’s. Black’s rook is strictly limited to the defense of the weak queen rook’s pawns. Both kings strive for the center squares. **32.Ke2 Ke7 33.Kd3 Kd6 34.Ra5! Ra8 35.Kd4 f5**

Black wants to prevent White’s plan to open the center via e3-e4. **36.b4 Rb8 37.a3 Ra8 38.e4!**

Forcing pawn exchanges, whereupon White’s rook increases its mobility. **38...fxe4 39.fxe4 dxe4 40.Kxe4 Ra7 41.Kf4**

White’s king is threatening to invade the opponent’s kingside with the maneuver 42.Kg5 and 43.Kh6. If 41...Ra8 42.Kg5 Ra7 43.Kh6 Ke6 44.h3 Kd6 45.g3 Ke6 45.a4 Rb7 47.Rxa6 Rxb4 48.Kxh7.

**41...h6 42.h4 Ke6 43.Qg4 Ra8 44.h5 g5 45. g3 Ra7 46.Kf3 Ra8 47.Ke4 Ra7 48.Kd4 Kd6 49.Ke4 Ke6**

As if drawn by a magnet, Black’s king dodges back and forth to prevent an invasion by the white king. **50.Re5+!**

See next diagram. Despite the state of material equality, Black must now give way, leaving one wing or the other indefensible. If 50...Kf6 51.Rc5 Rc7 52.a4

Ke6 53.b5 Kd6 54.Rxc6+ Rxc6 55.bxc6 Kxc6 56.Kf5, and the king and pawn ending is a dead loss for Black.



51...Re7+ 52.Rxe7 Kxe7 53.Ke5! is also losing.

**52.Rd8+ Kc6**  
After 52...Kc7 53.Rh8 cxb4 54.Rh7+ Kb8 55.Rxa7 Kxa7 56.axb4 Kb6 57.Kf5 Kb5 58.Kg6 Kxb4 59.Kxh6 a5 60.Kxg5 a4 61.h6, and White’s pawn promotes first!

**53.Rc8+ Kb6 54.Rxc5 Rh7 55.Re5 Kc6 56.Re6+ Kb5 57.Kf5 Rf7+ 58.Rf6 1-0**

The downfall of Black’s endgame was caused by the faulty position of his pawns, which condemned his own forces to passivity and offered objects for attack by White’s pieces.

Rook endgames are the most frequently occurring endgames in tournament practice. The principles of correctly playing them are based on the fact that the rook is one of the most powerful pieces for attacking hostile pawns. For instance, the bishop or knight can only attack immovable and blocked pawns, but the rook copes perfectly with a moving pawn.

There is a well-known rule that the rook is more effective behind the pawn than in front of it: whether attacking a hostile pawn or supporting the advance of one’s own.

When the rook is behind the pawn its field of action increases after every pawn move. Conversely, when the rook is placed in front of the pawn each pawn move diminishes the rook’s effectiveness. Therefore, the rook is less effective when defending and one should always prefer to attack.

So if you have an extra pawn, it is often better to give it up if it means that you can gain the necessary time to take the initiative. Moreover, since a good result in chess is provided by the harmonious cooperation of all the pieces, the king should try to act aggressively as well and not remain on the defensive.

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# Harold Dondis Testimonial Dinner

**Stephen Dann and George Mirijanian**

It was a stirring experience for this columnist to be present at the benefit testimonial dinner to honor Harold B. Dondis, 82, of Belmont. It was held on Nov. 12 at the Boston Globe and sponsored by the Massachusetts Chess Association.

The dinner commemorated not only the 40<sup>th</sup> year of his chess column, but also his affable character. A dozen speakers related what a respected player and volunteer Dondis is and how his affection for chess extended far beyond the 2,000+ columns he has written since 1964.

John Curdo was the first “main speaker” and he was kind enough to provide a transcript of his speech. After letting the audience know that he had won 729 tournaments, Curdo began as follows:

“We are here to honor brother Harold Dondis. What better way than the tournament trail. My earliest recollection of Harold was at Brown University on way to a tournament there in the early 60s. We were both lost, at an intersection, trying to find the playing site on campus. Somewhere along the trail we decided to join forces to reduce the possibility of getting lost. Can’t say we chess players aren’t smart.

To put things in perspective – over the past 30 years alone I’ve played in 1,200 tournaments, many, many of them with brother Harold. The tournament trail has brought us to some exotic places: the island of St. Martin (with its nude beaches) and prizes paid in \$50.00 dollar bills. Also North Bay, Ontario, Canada – beautiful country, nice prizes, terrible exchange rate. And a number of tournaments in Bermuda – tough duty that. As for the U.S. – all over: Scottsdale, Ariz., Concord, Calif., Las Vegas and Reno, Nev., Snowbird, Utah, St. Paul, Minn., Little Rock, Ark. – Florida a number of times, Washington D.C., many times in Philadelphia and on and on and on.

A couple of other incidents will show brother Harold’s character. When Harold had open-heart surgery a number of years ago, I visited him in the hospital with my trusty clipboard. He proceeded to dictate a couple of chess columns to me so his Boston Globe column didn’t miss a beat.

Considering the number of tournaments Harold and I have attended, we haven’t been paired to play that often. In large tournaments we would be in different sections, and so on. However, in 1982, we were paired in the final round of a small tournament in Lowell, Mass. Now I usually have my way with Harold, but this time he whipped me and won first prize to boot. Then he felt so bad he gave me the prize money.

If I had to sum up the character of brother Harold in one word, it would be *loyalty*. Harold is loyal to his family, his wife Claire, his friends, his work, and, of course, our chess community.



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**Claire and Harold Dondis**

And finally – I’ve been calling Harold brother because I had three brothers, all gone now; two older brothers, Arthur and Howard, and a younger brother Richard, who passed away three years ago. I sometimes jokingly call Harold my father, but he’s not old enough to be my father. He’s my common-law brother.”

Patrick Wolff of Virginia, formerly of Northampton and Belmont, became Dondis’ second partner less than 10 years ago, and now supplies a fully annotated game for one of the two columns that appear in the Globe each Monday and Tuesday. They talk each weekend via telephone, a big difference from earlier years when young Wolff was tutored by Curdo and driven to tournaments by Dondis. Wolff would go on to become a grandmaster, win the U.S. Championship twice and go on to a banking career.

Peter Hotton of Weymouth, better known as the Globe Handyman on Call, was the third speaker and told of his many years of editing Dondis’ column. For many years a group of mostly Globe employees met in Manchester, in what Hotton called the chess and chowder club, and Dondis was an infrequent visitor to this informal group, but that they were among the few surviving members of the club.

Other speakers included Mike Cavallo of Cambridge, former executive director of the U.S. Chess Federation in New Windsor, N.Y.; Dr. Edward Epp of Weston, veteran player; Mike Griffin of Quincy, representing the Boylston Chess Club of Somerville; and Barbara DeMaro of New York, who manages the U.S. Chess Trust, the educational chess charity Dondis helped found almost 40 years ago. DeMaro came with a big box, a chess table gift from the U.S. Chess Federation.

Locally, George Mirijanian of Fitchburg and this writer alternated in introducing the speakers, giving historical asides, and highlighting Harold’s achievements. It was

Dondis who established the U.S. Chess Trust almost 40 years ago to support the game “from the cradle to the grave.”

The trust, a 501-c-3, federal non-profit foundation, not only donates chess sets to schools and youth organizations, but also to the armed forces overseas, disabled veterans and senior programs. Support is also given to the World Chess Hall of Fame in Florida, sending representatives to the World Youth championships and donating USCF memberships to needy youth players. The address of the Trust is 3068 U.S. Route 9W, Suite 100, New Windsor, N.Y. 12553.

About 30 years ago he formed the Joseph Hurvitz Memorial Trust to support scholastic chess in the Bay State. The late Joseph Hurvitz of Chestnut Hill was an officer of the state association 50 years ago and helped incorporate the non-profit group in Boston in 1954. Donations to the fund are not dispersed; only the interest from its investments is used to support any shortfall in the state scholastic chess program. In recent years a third fund has emerged, combining all other state charitable funds, the Living Memorial Chess Fund, honoring past and present notables, funding programs in schools and social service programs and a host of other chess causes statewide. MACA treasurer Robert Messenger, 4 Hamlett Dr., #12, Nashua, NH. 03062, prepares reports on these funds several times a year and acknowledges donations that come from throughout New England and from players who have moved elsewhere in the country.

From 1961 to 1964 Harold was president of MACA

(then known as MSCA). When James Burgess, author of the Globe column from its inception in 1954, died in mid-1964, no one wanted to meet the weekly deadlines necessary for its continuation. Dondis stepped in, and 40 years later is still going strong.

Harold is one of six charter journalists that have entered the Gallery of Distinguished Chess Journalists. The Gallery is a new honor organized by the Cramer Committee of the Chess Journalists of America. The honorees are Hermann Helms (1870-1963), Israel “Al” Horowitz (1907-1973), GM Larry Evans (1932- ), Burt Hochberg (1933- ), Frank Brady (1934- ) and Harold Dondis (1922- ).

Three identical large plaques bearing the names of these six chess journalists will be on display at the Marshall Chess Club in New York, the Mechanics Institute in San Francisco, and in the entry area of the USCF’s new building in Crossville, Tenn.

We all may be guilty of taking Harold Dondis for granted. When you add up his roles as being one of MACA’s most active players, volunteers, donors, not to mention writing or co-writing more than 2,000 columns in the Boston Globe, is it not fitting that we honor him at the first MACA benefit dinner? Everyone can do this by contributing even a small sum to MACA’s Living Memorial Chess Fund! We need volunteers to plan and execute next year’s dinner, and, nominees for the guest(s) of honor. MACA’s long-serving volunteers should get more than just a thank you. Their legacy should be a positive seed toward the Association’s future growth.



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**John Curdo at the Dondis Testimonial**



**Stephen Dann (above) and GM Patrick Wolff (left) at the Dondis Testimonial Dinner**



**George Mirijanian (above)**

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