Project Proposal for Classical Rankings

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Table of Contents:

Executive Summary

Chess is a game of skill and intellect that's been around since the 8th century. It is played by 800 million people around the world and over 2000 variations of the game exist. Chess is a game that requires very little physical ability, allowing for participation among the disabled. It would be an understatement to say that Chess is a game with an audience. Playing Chess improves important life skills like critical thinking, planning, adaptation in the wake of unforeseen circumstances, and getting along with other people. Chess is a game that connects us and betters our lives in many ways, and our program serves to increase the availability of access to Chess for the students of LSU.

Our target clients are the members of the LSU Chess club, but this program could be of use to anyone interested in becoming involved with the Chess Club such as spectating matches or becoming an Arbiter. Classical Rankings is a flexible application, serving to fit the connectivity

needs of the user. Our application would streamline the process of finding an opponent, setting up a match, playing the said match, recording the result, and adjusting the rankings accordingly.

While there exist programs to coordinate chess players and keep track of rankings, they are a financial investment that not everyone can or will choose to pay for, and there is no cost-efficient alternative. Many chess players at LSU alone do not have a UCSF membership because of the 30 dollar subscription fee. To address this problem, our program will provide accessibility to finding a chess opponent, scheduling a game, finding a chess game to spectate, checking the current rankings of the chess club members for no charge, and in the future users will have even more features such as accessing a livestream of matches or finding arbiters.
Our team will use open source web technologies to develop Classical Rankings to reduce the cost of development and eliminate any subscription cost for the users during its initial stages.

Gap in the Market

While other ranking apps for chess players are available, most require a subscription to access, making it not a viable option for more local/casual play. These apps also typically lack the ability to plan in-person games with other users. This function would be particularly useful when it comes to the local Chess club at LSU, which would benefit from a system designed around over-the-board play. Therefore, the main gap in the market we are targeting is lowering the paywall while increasing the general accessibility of these services.

Meeting the Market's Needs

Our website will meet the market's need for a free and easily accessible chess rank tracker and game planner, where players can create accounts, track their progress, and challenge other players in local games. The goal of this website is to provide more high-quality games for players who want a tournament experience without the hassle of the planning typically involved. This website could track upcoming matches to potentially allow players to schedule larger events, such as tournaments, in addition to smaller more casual matches.

Implementation

Management
Classical Rankings will be managed initially entirely by our team. Upon endorsement by the LSU Chess Club, managerial tasks may be delegated to the president, officers, and other leadership of the club. The tasks delegated to the Chess Club would include managing access to the paid portion of the program and managing the rankings of users, as well as initiating and moderating streams in the future.

Development
> The Ranking System will be developed using the following technologies:
> Use of Github to make collaboration between the members easier.
> VSCode or a similar IDE will be used as the text editor when developing.

Frontend:
> React or Vue.js (Frameworks for building user interface)

Backend:
> Node.js (A JavaScript runtime environment)
> Express (Fast, non opinionated, minimalist web framework for Node.js)
> Mongodb (NoSQL Database)

Once the website is finished, it will be deployed on Heroku or other similar services.

Marketing and Distribution

Our product will be advertised to the LSU chess team via working with them on a system that fits the desired ranking system for their games and then to the rest of our target audience via posters and social media presence such as Discord and Reddit. Our product will be very reliant on social media. Today social media is the largest market for advertisement companies. Most of our target market will have some kind of presence on social media and could see the advertisements to our product that will show a brief summary of its purpose and features.

Monetization

The source of revenue for the website will mainly come from ad placement on the site. The ads will be in classic sidebar advertisements set up that enable companies to pay for ads for users to see. The ads will preferably be chess or game-related advertisements that are specialized for the users that will be on the site using the application. However, the other source of revenue will be from a small paid subscription that users can pay for more permissions and tools when managing clubs on the site and use the site without ads. These permissions include things such as the creation of groups and management of said groups. The revenue from this source will most likely be less than from advertisements in the early stages, however, with the growth of the product the subscription revenue will increase.

The Problem and Our Solution

Members of the LSU Chess Club have an inefficient ranking system for their club to properly rank the players. Their system hasn't changed in several years and is currently an excel sheet that is manually changed by the officers of the club. Some of the problems with this current system are the time it takes to update the ranking, the work for the officers to change the ranking, the lack of accessibility for the members to check the rankings in real-time, and a lack of an efficient method to challenge players to games of over the table chess.

Our solution to these problems is the web-based ranking system that players can use to create accounts that they use to challenge other members to games and be ranked according to their results. The results will be input into the site from the members and the program will change the

rankings accordingly. The rankings can be viewed by the players and they will be able to check the rankings after they input the results and can very quickly see the rankings change. This will be more convenient for the players and officers. In addition, the players can also send off challenges via the application to schedule a game with another member.

Industry Need for Our Technology

The need for the product can potentially expand past the chess club and branch to other clubs or groups that are competitively based. A current chess-based ranking system uses a fairly large paywall that makes it inaccessible to many players. Our application can be used for various competitive games that groups of players can utilize to rank and challenge each other to games so that they can create and use an accurate ranking system that is easily accessible to them. Many current ranking systems in the industry either can only be used behind a large paywall, are very manual in an effort to change the rankings, or are set to a global/national scale that wouldn't benefit groups that want to rank players in the group or other local groups. The application has a lot of demand when it comes to clubs in need of a way to efficiently and accurately place one another.

Market Analysis / Primary Market / Secondary Market

The main competition for Classical Rankings are companies like USCF and chess.com. USCF is a widely used program that is known in the chess community, however, many people do not use the program due to its steep paywall that most casual and competitive players are not willing to pay. Chess.com does have a ranking system but it is only for online games on their site and is mainly used for global ranks. Classical Rankings is used mainly for local play. The goal is to show people a system that doesn't require payment that allows them to play over the table chess while also efficiently ranking their players. Our goal is to show users that our product offers them services that other products cannot.

The primary market for the product at first is the LSU chess club, however, it can be used for any chess club and organization outside of LSU. The secondary market would be other clubs and organizations that are not chess-based that could still benefit from a free ranking service for their competitive groups.

Marketing Strategies

Overview

Classical Rankings looks to capitalize on a lack of alternative to the current paid program of UCSF by providing users with an application that accomplishes the same uses of the UCSF subscription but at no cost. We would like Classical Rankings to have no initial cost of use so that we can accrue users and their valuable feedback as well. Our team will work to continually improve the systems to make the user's experience as fluid as possible, and add new features as needed.

Primary Customer analysis and entry strategy

Our primary customer will be any members of the LSU Chess club. We will enter the market with a working product accessible for free to show our customers that our product is better than the rudimentary methods for the same zero cost. If our product is successful we may institute a small subscription fee when we become endorsed by the LSU Chess Club, as well as branch out to other universities Chess Clubs and even adjust our product to accommodate other game clubs.

Core competency

The core competency of our product will be the offering of accessibility to finding a chess opponent, scheduling a game, finding a chess game to spectate, checking the current rankings of the chess club members for no charge, and eventually accessing a livestream of matches, finding arbiters, and more, all for no charge. We will continue to monitor the feedback we receive from our users to create more uses for our application. Our application could even be tweaked to work for any other game clubs such as fighting games like Smash Brothers, or even non-gaming clubs that need an application for organized connectivity.

Sales Strategy

Pricing

Our primary selling point will be the lack of any subscription fee to use our product, so upon its creation and into the immediate future remain free to use.

Positioning

We intend Classical Rankings to be free, easy to access, and easy to use for anyone that wishes to use it

Promotion

The product will be marketed to anyone interested in chess. We will contact members of the chess club, especially the president, officers, and other leadership, through email to

inform them about our free product. We will encourage feedback on it's weaknesses and if it gains popularity, contact the chess club about a possible endorsement as LSU's official Chess Club organization system.

Place
Classical Rankings will be a website accessible to anyone with internet connection.

Competition

United States Chess Federation (USCF): The official chess federation for the US. Their system allows players to play in USCF-rated tournaments and receive a rating based on their performance. It uses glicko to determine the rating of the player. The membership also comes with a monthly chess magazine. USCF membership costs from $20 - $45 per year depending on the age.

Lichess.org, chess.com, and other chess websites:
Players can challenge each other to an online game and the results are automatically stored on the website. Lichess and Chess.com use glicko, elo, or similar ranking system to determine how many rating points a player gains or loses after winning, drawing, or losing a game. The websites are free to play, but chess.com offers a subscription to access certain features like game analysis and unlimited puzzles.

Old Ranking System:
Players can send an email to each other to set up a match. Once the results are sent to the officers, it is added to an excel sheet which updates the rank of the players. This system costs $5 a semester as part of the membership fee.

Development Strategy

The website will be developed using modules and in stages to make sure that the project stays on track and works properly.

Seed Stage: In the seed stage we will create the prototype systems for the groundwork of the working website (databases, log in system, etc.)

Startup Stage: We will implement these systems into a basic working version of the product

Development stage: Once we have a working product we can focus on improving the site by addressing any bugs we encounter and implementing more features to increase the usefulness of our product

Barriers

The website will face a few couple barriers when trying to enter this market:
- Availability of players to play a slower chess game in a given week.
- Competition with other systems like USCF for over-the-board chess and lichess or chess.com for online chess.
- Any technical difficulties, frontend or backend, when attempting to build or access the website, databases, etc.

Critical Risks

One Critical Risk in the creation of Classical Rankings is that customers who have already invested in using the competition may view using our product as a downgrade of quality, or resist usage of it because they do not want to come to view their financial investments into the competition as a waste of money.

Our team will work hard to ensure that our product is flexible enough to accommodate casual unofficiated play as well as high-level regulated matches to ensure maximum connectivity and fluidity of the community's playtime experience, as well as ensure a high-quality user experience through front end improvement.

Interviews

What is your name? 16 Responses:
- Christopher Simoni
- William Grazian
- Andrew Bray
- Phoenix
- Joel guerra
- Aubrey Stewart
- Lauren Chauvin
- Malik Martin
- Ian Chen
- Spencer
- Olivia Cooper
- Landon Truong
- William Milliron
- Ford Morris
- Carson Badinger
- Marcus Heinse

Do you have a USCF membership? 16 Responses:
- No
- No
- Yes
- yes
- No
- Yes
- Not this year
- Yes
- no
- no
- not active
- No
- No
- No
- No
- No

Were you aware that the club had an in-house ranking system? If yes, what would you improve in the previous ranking system? 16 Responses:
- Elo or glicko would be cool instead of flat rankings, also making it easier to set up matches is a virtual necessity
- No
- Yes, it would be cool to have blitz/rapid ratings as well as the classical games, also I'd like to have Fridays where we can formally challenge anyone at the meeting as well so it's already set up instead of having to seek out each individual we want to challenge.
- N/A
- No
- Streamline the challenging/accepting system so that members can be notified as to when they've been challenged.
- I helped make it :) new ranking rules
- No
- no
- no
- No
- No
- No
- Didn't know
- No
- No

Would you use the website if it were more accessible than USCF? 16 Responses:
- Yeah
- Maybe

- Definitely
- sure, but not quite sure what this means
- Yes
- Yes
- Absolutely
- Not sure
- yes
- yes
- Sure
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- yes

Are you interested in more serious OTB play? 16 Responses:
- Yeah sure why not
- Sure
- ABSOLUTELY
- yes
- Yes
- Desperately
- Not this year lol
- Yes
- yes
- yes
- Hell yeah
- Absolutely
- Yeah
- Yes?
- Yes
- yes

How often have you played OTB chess in the last 6 months? 16 Responses:
- Only at chess club meetings really
- Twice
- Two rated tournaments, decently often casually
- Casual OTB games frequently, but no serious games
- Weekly
- Twice, but not by choice
- Certainly not enough
- 1 tournament(first OTB tournament)
- very rarely
- no

- 3 times. Tuesday, Thursday and Friday last week.
- Since I got here
- 0 times
- At the club was only time in last 6 months
- Every game
- few times a week

How often can you play a slow chess game in a month? 16 Responses:
- Depends on how slow, but I'm not often particularly busy
- Frequently or as needed
- As often as there are opportunities
- probably too much
- Couple games
- 5 times if it's convenient and streamlined
- Probably once
- Not often
- ~4 times
- 10
- Once a week or so
- Often
- Once or twice
- Never played a game over 30 min
- All my games are slow chess games
- once or twice

How would you prefer to receive the challenge request? (Text, email, through the website) 16 Responses:
- Email or text, really anything with push notifications is much superior
- Email
- Email first so that I'd be comfortable meeting said person before, and then I'd give my phone number after I make sure they're good
- email would be nice
- Text
- All of the above?
- Text
- Email
- text
- email
- Whatever works
- Text and email
- Text
- Text
- Text and/or email
- text

What kinds of features do you expect to be on the website? 16 Responses:

- A way to report matches and a display if the current rankings/ratings
- Leaderboards, and ways of seeing who's available to play.
- Challenge request and notifications through email would be excellent, messaging forums/boards to talk about puzzles and positions, and to talk about challenging people
- some rating system and listing of OTB games we can attend
- Chess
- Profiles for players to share a little about themselves such as favorite players and openings. Times of day/days of the week that they are most readily available to play. An in-house chess article hyping up upcoming matches.
- Easy viewing ranking, event list display on top page, login for each user
- Rankings, ways to challenge
- not sure. I'm a computer science major though, I'd be happy to help with the website if needed :)
- idk
- I have no idea what this website is even gonna be
- *response omitted*
- Idk man y'all got this
- I don't expect much
- Hmm not sure honestly
- Whatever the older members think is best