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MACHINES VERSUS HUMAN IN EYE-OPENING CHESS CHAMPIONSHIPS AT CHINESE UNIVERSITY

Could the machines beat human beings and become masters of their own destiny? This may seem far-fetched and would only occur in science fictions, but this is happening -- at least in chess playing.

In rapid chess lasting less than two hours, World Champion Gary Kasparov has twice been beaten by two computer chess programmes.

And history could be re-written again this Sunday (May 28) when these two record-holding chess-playing computers -- FRITZ, from the Netherlands; and CHESS GENIUS, from Britain, will challenge a six-person team comprising Hong Kong's strongest chess-players in a five-hour match.

The Hong Kong team members are: Dr. Wong Meng-kong, Mr. Xian Yang, Mr. Jonathan Ady, Mr. David Carless, Mr. Kaarlo Schepel and Dr. Tsang Hon Ki.

The match is organized as part of the 8th World Computer Chess Championships at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which is taking place for the first time in Asia.

This year, the triennial event has attracted 24 entrants from 10 countries, which represent the world's finest chess-playing computers. The scores of computer chess enthusiasts attending the event come from ten countries -- including the United States, Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Hungary, Canada, Denmark, Spain and Israel. Among them are representatives of prestigious Universities, computer companies, research centres as well as amateurs.

"Chess-playing is fun as well as educational. And computer chess involves advance computer science such as artificial intelligence. Each step which the computer makes could be preceded by millions of computer calculations involving super-computers," says Prof. Omar Wing, the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Primarily sponsored by IBM, the event is hosted by the International Computer Chess Association in conjunction with the University.

"By bringing this event to Asia, we hope to arouse the interest of young people not only in chess, but also in the exciting developments in computer sciences," he said.

The Championships will run for five days until Monday (May 29) at the Ho Sin Hang Engineering Building at the University Campus. There will be five rounds of competition -- eaching lasting six hours from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

The best five chess-playing computers which will emerged after the first four rounds will team up with a Saitek computer to challenge the Hong Kong team on Sunday (May 27). This special match takes places from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. All matches are open to public viewing.

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