



*Photos Courtesy of Brad Hoehne (left: GM Georgiev / center: Arnold Schwarzenegger / right: IM Kannappan)*

## 2016 Arnold Schwarzenegger Open

*By Kelly M. Bloomfield*

The inaugural Arnold Schwarzenegger Open was not your typical chess tournament. There was so much to do and see in between rounds, from weightlifting, to fencing, to strongman competitions, to table tennis, to pole fitness, and on and on. There are 50+ competitions that take place each year at the Arnold Sports Festival in Columbus, Ohio and chess joined the ranks this year. We were billed as "fitness of the mind" and we certainly did not disappoint as our competition started on Friday evening and we were the last competition to finish late Sunday night. The Arnold Sports Festival is the largest multi-sport event in the nation with more than 18,000 athletes from 80 nations competing in more than fifty sports and events.

Arnold Schwarzenegger himself is an avid chess player and he often uses chess to keep his mind sharp while he is on his movie set in between scenes. He was instrumental in bringing chess to the Arnold Sports Festival insisting that it be part of this historic event, so in the summer of 2014 Jim Lorimer from Classic Productions reached out to me and asked me to be the chairman of chess and help add our sport to this festival.

In 2015 chess was added to the Arnold Sports Festival all centered on scholastic chess. We had 150 kids that played in a one day scholastic tournament at Nationwide Arena home of the NHL hockey team Columbus Bluejackets. All the participants received a ticket to that night's hockey game and one lucky kid got to ride the Zamboni during intermission of the game, while others got to sit on the bench with the players during warm-ups. Everyone really enjoyed themselves and it was a great venue. At the Ohio Expo Center we also had a 40' x 35' area in the Bricker Building to promote chess to children. I arranged for Grand Master Vladimir Georgiev to come down from the Chicago Area and he held a lecture followed by a SIMUL on both Saturday and Sunday. I also set up an exhibition match between two local young players (Emma Cheng and Ethan Feng) against Arnold himself. Local news crews were everywhere for this match and our small area was suddenly flooded with nearly 300+ plus people. Emma and Ethan did not disappoint taking down the "Terminator" in less than 20 moves. To be fair I did put Arnold in a tough situation without realizing it... If he wins against a little kid in chess he looks bad and if he loses then he also looks bad. I was simply trying to promote chess and Arnold was kind enough to oblige... Thank you Arnold!

So here we are in 2016 and the 28<sup>th</sup> edition of the Arnold Sports Festival. This year I shifted the focus to be all inclusive, rather than just scholastic, for many reasons but one was due to the fact that Jim Lorimer from Classic Productions wanted us to be a part of the main festival downtown at the Greater Columbus Convention Center. This year I decided to host an Open Tournament in which 70% of the entry fees were given back in prizes, a Blitz Tournament, a GM Simul, and once again we had an area at the Ohio Expo Center to help promote chess to children.

Downtown, 190,000 people crowded their way into the convention center to see all the festivities and chess was put in the spotlight, countless people stopping by the chess area to see what a tournament was like. I used my 8 DGT boards to broadcast the top boards live in a theater style seating outside the main playing hall so all could watch and comment on the games without bothering the players. The tournament hall was open and everyone was very respectful of the required silence. Most people who had never experienced a chess tournament were quite shocked that a single game could go on for more than 5 hours. I like to challenge people who have never participated in a chess tournament like this to try it once so they can see how mentally and physically exhausted they will be at the end of 3 days. (Don't tell me it is not a sport!)

The competition was fierce in the Open Section... having 2 Grand Masters, 3 International Masters, and several National Masters as well. Grand Master Vladimir Georgiev and International Master Priyadharshan Kannappan tied for first with 4 out of 5. National sensation Jason Wang won the U2100 prize with 2.5 out of 5 in the open section.

In the Premier Section local Columbus player Aryan Balyan scored a perfect 5 out of 5 to take clear first. Emma Cheng took first place in the U1700 with 3.5 out of 5 while in the U1550 there was a tie between Mark Carroll and Lucas Lumbra with 3 out of 5. In the Reserve Section Jonathan Rissing scored a perfect 5 out of 5 to take clear first.

In the Blitz tournament held on Sunday in between rounds 4 and 5 we had 31 players participate with International Master Priyadharshan Kannappan winning all 7 of his games for clear first. I was so impressed with his performance that I sweetened his top prize for the perfect score.

One of my favorite moments from this year's tournament was when a couple of players withdrew. (Really you ask?) It was because they were having so much fun going and experiencing other sports and seeing all the interesting people. As a matter of fact one withdrew with 1.5 out of 2 after the second round. My only regret this year was that Arnold did not have time in his busy schedule to stop by the playing hall but in 2015 he gave an enormous amount of time to help promote chess.

Although the numbers were lower than I had hoped for this year, I am sure next year will be even bigger and better. I am hoping for 200+ participants in next year's 2017 Arnold Schwarzenegger Open. Thank you to all who came and supported our event and helped show everyone that chess is a sport.