

AUSTRALIAN JUNIOR CHESS PROBLEM-SOLVING CHAMPIONSHIP CANBERRA 2007

Report, and Suggestions for the Future

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1. This inaugural event took place on 23rd January 2007 from 10 am to 12 noon. The number of entries was 97 (each had paid a \$5 entry fee); of these, 86 took part as competitors (the other 11 were sick or decided to take a rest). The years of birth ranged from 1989 to 2000.
2. Each competitor was provided with a board and men. Most solved from the board and men, while a much smaller number solved from the diagrams.
3. The time taken was noted when a question sheet was submitted, and was used when needed to break ties (however, it is suggested that this might better be dispensed with in the future). Few competitors left particularly early, and quite a large number stayed for the whole time.
4. The questions and solutions, with diagrams, are available on the Championship's web site http://www.actjcl.org.au/ausjuniors2007/section_puzzle.php. The front page of the question sheet is shown at the end of this file, as well as the tasks in Forsyth notation.
5. I had prepared an article entitled "A Quick Introduction to Chess Problems and End-game Studies", which was available on the Championship's web site for many months before the competition and is still available there. Just before solving started, I asked competitors whether they had read that article; regrettably, none had read it. As a result, some competitors did not know what was required (a few thought "White to play and mate in 2 moves" meant that White plays 2 moves in succession without a Black move intervening). If competitors had read that article, I believe the task would have been very much easier for many competitors, especially the younger competitors, and the marks gained would have increased greatly. It is therefore strongly suggested for future such competitions that extra steps be taken to ensure that all competitors know in advance what problems and studies are, and that they have been exposed to a suitable introduction to them, with examples.
6. The format of the question sheet worked well: a single A3 sheet folded over to take up A4 size, with only the instructions on the front page so that the sheet could be placed unopened on the tables in advance. Diagrams were large and of excellent quality. It is suggested that a similar format be considered also in the future.
7. During the solving period Geoff Foster and I were available to answer questions from the competitors. Quite a few questions were asked; two invigilators turned out to be the right number (a maximum of 50 competitors per invigilator has been suggested). The most common question was "which way does White move?": it is suggested that in future it be explicitly stated on the question sheet that White moves up the diagram in all cases, and that for young solvers the diagrams be labelled a-h, 1-8. It might also be suggested to solvers that they may indicate solutions with arrows on the diagrams. When one of the youngest competitors said he didn't know what to do, I asked him whether he had read the instructions on the front page; his unexpected answer was "I can't read", a consequence of his age, so I

read the instructions to him.

8. Marking was carried out by Geoff Foster and myself. We each marked each answer independently on marking sheets prepared in advance. On the first pass, we awarded only full marks or no marks, leaving blank spaces where partial credit might be awarded on a second pass. By the time we made the second pass, we had formed ideas about appropriate partial credit, and Geoff prepared a list of the cases in which that would be done. For example, in question 7 a very good try was 1.Nd4, which was awarded 8 marks out of 13. In some cases partial credit was awarded more generously for the younger than for the older competitors. Marking took about 8 hours spread over two days. The marking task involved not only the evaluation of the answers but also the checking of clerical accuracy in recording the marks. The option which the competitors had of writing in brief progress reports on unsolved tasks was taken up only a little and did not delay marking. No difference of opinion arose between the two markers, but a few clerical errors were resolved. In the selection of tasks one should keep in mind easy marking, which was effective this time.

9. Many prizes were presented: trophies, cash, books, computer programs, and magazine subscriptions. The donations were and are acknowledged on the Championship web site.

10. It is clear from the results, presented later in this report, that the tasks were too hard for the younger competitors. It is therefore suggested that for them some much easier tasks be set, probably including some "mate in 1" problems and other types of questions. This might depend upon the members of the Australian chess problem community, who supported the event financially, being willing to relax the standards they would otherwise apply in the selection of questions. Separate sets of questions might therefore be set for two or three age-divisions – obviously requiring more time spent by the coordinators. Whether a similar competition would be worth trying at non-Junior events or elsewhere could be considered.

Anecdotes

11. The general impression from their comments was that competitors enjoyed the event. The administrators also seemed satisfied with it. All comments heard were positive.

12. One top competitor commented that he had trained for problem-solving during the preceding month or two, and was somewhat surprised that he had not previously seen any of the tasks set. That confirmed that the set tasks should be obscure; in this case that requirement was very well provided for by Geoff Foster (problems) and Roger Cook (studies), and I gratefully acknowledge their help.

13. I asked a very young prize-winner, whose marks were much higher than those of almost all the older competitors, how he did so well in solving problems. He replied that his coach routinely included problem-solving in his coaching. I then discussed that with the coach, who said that long ago he himself had greatly benefited from solving the problems in John Kellner's newspaper column. There we see the implications such an effort may have in future years.

Some Statistics of the Marks
(Please see Tables 1 and 2 below.)

14. It should be borne in mind that, regrettably, the competitors had not read the specially prepared article “A Quick Introduction to Chess Problems and End-game Studies”: that reduced the value of the competition and the significance of the marks, especially for younger competitors, and the marks gained should be interpreted accordingly. For instance, some competitors did not know what “mate in 2 moves” means, and some were evidently solving as if the position arose in an ordinary game of chess. If they had read the Introduction they would no doubt have understood much better what their tasks were. No disparagement was ever intended towards those scoring low marks.

15. As this was the first serious junior solving competition known to me, it would have been interesting to see what is the lowest age at which children can deal competently with the notion of “mate in 2” etc., but under the present conditions we can only see what the competitors made of it without having been exposed to a preamble. Whether the younger ones could have handled the tasks after being introduced to them remains unknown. Another factor is that some coaches featured problem-solving in their coaching and others did not. Still, working through this statistical exercise may pave the way towards more informative results in the future.

16. In any case, some value may be found in the statistics for the older competitors. Although the tasks were too difficult for the younger competitors, the tasks turned out to be not quite difficult enough for the oldest ones, as several solved them all, in some cases with considerable time to spare. It is suggested that at least one specially difficult task be set for the older competitors, with provision for partial credit, in order to provide better separation at the highest level.

17. The studies ([2], [6], [8]) were somewhat better solved than the problems (perhaps because an introduction to them was less necessary). The easy [1], though necessarily lacking artistic excellence, provided some satisfaction for many of the younger competitors, and it is suggested that more such tasks, and easier ones still, should be set for them in the future.

18. Some outstanding individual results were seen. Almost all the competitors aged 16 and over were outstanding. Also a boy born in 1995 (under 12) scored 95 percent, and a girl born in 1994 (under 14) scored 44 percent. The performances in the problem-solving event correlated closely with those in the remainder of the tournament. Since this first competition of its kind turned out to be not yet well calibrated for the younger solvers, and since there is no wish to disparage their efforts, the marks of individual competitors are not being reported.

19. It is clear that those aged 16 and over handled problems and studies very easily – even more easily than had been anticipated. But, apart from a few individual exceptions, younger ones did not (without having read an introduction to the subject). Possibly the tasks set were inherently too hard for the younger ones, possibly they had simply not encountered such tasks before, or possibly both explanations contributed. This can easily be remedied next time.

Best wishes for the future!

Nigel Nettheim, 2 February 2007

Table 1. Number of Competitors, for each Year of Birth and each Sex

Year	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	Total
Male	3	3	3	8	4	8	13	14	4	5	2	2	69
Female	0	0	2	1	1	2	2	3	3	2	1	0	17
Total	3	3	5	9	5	10	15	17	7	7	3	2	86

Table 2. Percent of Total Marks Scored, for each Year of Birth and each Task

Results for males and females are combined here. The tasks are available at the Championship web site mentioned earlier. Maximum marks obtainable are shown in parentheses; each cell shows the percent of these awarded (not absolute marks).

Task	#2 Rd2 (7)	Win Re8ch (8)	#2 Re3 (9)	#2 Nh1 (10)	#2 Bh8 (11)	Draw h7ch (12)	#2 Ng5 (13)	Draw Rb3 (14)	#3 Bh7 (16)	(100)
Year	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]	All
89	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
90	100	100	74	100	67	100	41	100	100	86
91	60	30	24	40	24	40	0	1	2.5	21
92	78	83	22	22	33	45	34	44	24	40
93	100	27.5	20	10	42	53	2	21	0	26
94	70	26	2	12	33	37.5	10	34	5	23
95	80	22.5	28	30	14	14	4	7	7	19
96	47	10	1	6	6	13	8	6	0	9
97	57	55	5	10	6	42	1	3	1	16
98	29	11	5	1	9	5	1	2	2	6
99	33	4	0	17	0	0	0	0	0	4
00	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0.5
All	64	33	17	22	22	30	12	20	12	23

[Front page of question sheet:]

**AUSTRALIAN JUNIOR CHESS
PROBLEM-SOLVING CHAMPIONSHIP
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COMPETITOR:

NAME:

SECTION:

The marks obtainable are shown (total 100); they are not intended as accurate indications of difficulty, but only as a guide to the order of difficulty.

Please write your solutions in the spaces provided. For 2-move problems, just give the key-move; for the 3-move problem give also White's second move in each case. For studies, just go far enough to reach a clearly winning, or drawing, position, without giving minor details.

If you are unable to solve a problem or study, or are not sure that your solution is correct, then you may write a brief indication of your progress. For example, "The solution will be a move of the WR" or "The solution can't be a move of the WQ – it will probably be a move of the WN" or "White will threaten to mate with his Bishop" or "White has to do something against Black's ...Qg2".

Quite a lot of tasks are set; solve as many as you can, but there is no expectation that you will solve them all! An answer sheet will be available at the conclusion of the solving period.

The tasks in Forsyth notation

(The high quality diagrams, which are available on the Championship web site mentioned earlier, would make this file too large.)

1. 8/8/4K3/8/4k3/5n2/5PB1/2BR4 (#2)
2. 2K2k1r/5p2/6P1/4RP2/8/8/8/8 (win)
3. 2b5/B1kq3R/8/3QR3/8/8/8/K7 (#2)
4. 6Rn/8/4p2k/4P3/4Qp2/3p2N1/3P2p1/6K1 (#2)
5. 8/K1p5/8/R3B3/3Q1p2/4bB2/4R2S/2r3k1 (#2)
6. 1r4k1/8/7P/7P/6q1/8/K1Q5/8 (draw)
7. 3KbRr1/3p2r1/Q3N1pB/2pBkq1R/5N2/4p2P/16 (#2)
8. 8/K7/8/8/8/5R2/4p3/4b2k (draw)
9. 8/8/Q6K/8/2p5/p7/rPB5/k7 (#3)