

## **President's Report – A New Way Forward**

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As we know from the game of chess, we must always be alert to danger and ready to change our plan. When we embark on an ambitious campaign, we often face unforeseen threats and difficult problems. As we do on the chessboard, in life and in business we try to meet adversity and setback by rethinking our situation and adapting our strategy to the new realities. Often times this involves doing things in a brand-new way: finding opportunities to re-channel our strengths, learning to use new tools, and repurposing old resources.

For Chess Nova Scotia, the year 2020 began on a positive note. We had recently taken several first steps in an exciting new direction. In the months before we had renamed our association from its decade's old moniker to the streamlined Chess Nova Scotia. The change was symbolic of our fresh new mindset and it signaled an energetic, first push to rebrand ourselves as a modern non-profit. The idea was — and still is — to become as visible and relevant to Nova Scotians as activity-based organizations like Sport Nova Scotia.

At the start of 2020, registered as a non-profit with a new name, we had also recently created a constitution and set of bylaws, allowing us to forge ahead with a clear new mandate. We made these fundamental changes to give ourselves legitimacy and a more solid foundation as we endeavor to encourage interest in chess throughout Nova Scotia and promote the game as a healthful, powerful recreation for all ages.

Before March of this year, we were in the midst of planning several ambitious legacy chess projects, including a senior's outreach, sponsored by the provincial senior's department, and an afterschool program developed in consultation with the NS department of education. We had aimed to launch these initiatives this

summer in conjunction with the hosting of our first signature, national-level chess event, Pawn Wise: The Atlantic All-Ages Chess Festival, 2020.

But, alas, as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century German chess great Siegbert Tarrasch famously said: “Before the endgame, the Gods have placed the middle game.”

In mid-March when the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly upended life as we know it, our chess community found out — as did the entire world — the painful truth of Tarrasch’s words. That is, we saw how easily our lives can be turned upside down and our plans completely knocked off course by circumstances beyond our control. We all found out that nature itself can be a ruthless opponent with a wicked plan.

Due to the pandemic, as spring began we had to shelve our ambitions and go into lockdown. Sadly, we were forced to shut down our chess clubs, cancel the festival and all our other tournaments planned for 2020. We also had to put off the launch of our senior’s and children’s chess programs and scuttle the chess lessons scheduled at the Halifax Central Library.

So what now? With winter coming on and a possible new wave of the pandemic, what is our plan?

Well, we will continue to do the few things that we’re still able to do, until it’s safe to do more. As we did in the summer with the youth-led Zoom lecture in July, we can host the library sessions virtually. We plan to do at least one more of those this year. The Halifax Central Library has been a very good partner in the Chess at the Library program, as they reached out to us in June with the offer to do the lectures online. The library was very helpful in setting up the July session and they have also asked me to start a chess blog for their website, which I am working on now.

As for tournaments, we will take stock of the situation with respect to COVID-19 in the new year and determine then if it would be safe and practical to host tournaments in 2021. By springtime, maybe it will be okay to run a tournament. Let’s hope.

I will now give an update and status report on some of the major happenings this year:

## **Pawn Wise**

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic we had to cancel the Pawn Wise festival. We made the decision in mid-April. This was very disappointing. We put in many hours of planning for the event, which we saw as a bold first step in bringing chess to all Nova Scotians, young and old, and putting our province on the map as a hub for chess in Canada.

Also due to the pandemic, Pawn Wise festival coordinator, Roger Langen, and I see no realistic possibility of hosting the event — as originally envisioned — in 2021 either. We do not think we would be able to stage the festival next year with all the planned special events and the participation of guests and players traveling from outside of Canada.

At this point we are looking at 2022 for the Pawn Wise festival at the earliest.

Encouragingly, though, many of the titled players, guests, and panelists who had signed up have said they will come back for a rescheduled event.

Note that our fundraising for Pawn Wise is on hold. Before the pandemic hit, we were waiting to hear back on some fairly significant sponsorships and a grant, all of which have since been suspended to subsequent years. We had applied to Saint Mary's University for sponsorship of \$15,000, to Destination Halifax for \$8,000, and to the NS Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage for a grant of \$15,000. We will resume these and other fundraising efforts for Pawn Wise when the time is right.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our many members who have sponsored and donated to the festival. Your generosity is much appreciated. It will go a long way toward making the festival a success. As stated, we have every intention of hosting Pawn Wise as soon as it is safe to do so. Please rest assured that the money given to the festival is in safe keeping and will be used for the event when we are able to eventually run it.

On that note, our finances for the festival are as follows: in the bank we have \$13,789.34, plus \$7,500 in a GIC. Our Visa balance on the Pawn Wise account is zero.

Also note that we have reached out to all of the players who had registered for Pawn Wise 2020 and given a full refund to those who requested it. Very few of the registrants asked for their money back, as most of them told us to hang on to it for their registration in a rescheduled event.

We do have permission from the CFC to host the Canadian Seniors Championship in 2021 (the anchor event that we had planned to run at Pawn Wise 2020). We will make a decision by March 15, 2021 on whether or not to hold the senior's championship in 2021.

**Note:** if we were to go ahead with the senior's tournament in 2021 it would be a no-frills tournament, i.e., no side events, no international players or guests, no panel, etc. It would not be billed as a chess festival. It would in no way be related to Pawn Wise. As I mentioned, we do not plan to host Pawn Wise until 2022 at the earliest.

### **Tournament Calendar**

Due to the pandemic, we did not run any tournaments after February of this year. We cancelled the ones planned for May and September, as Saint Mary's University would not rent us the room as originally planned. We did not look for another site, as we did not think we could adequately implement social distancing at the tournaments and provide the various other recommended safety measures.

The November tournament is also cancelled. Mount Saint Vincent University is still restricting access to campus and would not rent us the room. Again, we did not look for an alternate playing site.

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### **On the Bright Side**

I would like to mention some high points in the last year or so, share some encouraging news, and give thanks to some of the volunteers who helped us promote chess to Nova Scotians:

- Ian Anderson: Ian took on the painstaking task of going through piles of hard copies of tournament game scores — many of them barely legible — and converting them to PGNs for our games database. This is great because it helps us build our historical record of chess playing in Nova Scotia. Ian has also been very active in the chess clubs in the valley and helping other clubs start up. Thanks Ian!
- David Bardsley has been very helpful at the tournaments running the DGT boards. This effort is very much appreciated, as the electronic boards bring a new level of excitement to the tournaments, allow us to better engage our chess community, and bring the game to a larger audience. Thanks David!
- Stephen Saunders: Stephen runs the Bridgewater Chess Club, which he was able to open back up this summer. That is very encouraging and thanks, Steve, for your determination! Going forward perhaps you can advise us on the logistics for opening back up safely and establishing COVID-19 safety protocols for when we do start the tournaments again and reopen the other clubs.
- Farhana Kanth: In addition to her work with the scholastic chess association Farhana has helped us as a liaison with the Dalhousie Chess Club and with the youth coordinator at the Chess Federation of Canada. She also helped us with our successful sponsorship proposal to the provincial senior's department and helped coordinate the library lectures. In addition, Farhana assisted with the Chronicle-Herald story this summer, as she and her son Jerjis were interviewed and written about in the story. Thank you so much Farhana!
- Lloyd Lombard: Lloyd has been invaluable as an expert in helping us draft our constitution and bylaws. Lloyd spent countless hours developing those last year and we very much appreciate it! Lloyd also coordinated a large purchase of chess equipment for us and he set up our bank account under our new name: Chess Nova Scotia. He also runs the Middleton chess club. Thanks LLOYD!

- Roger Langen: Roger has been amazing in his effort to help us take chess to a whole new level in Nova Scotia. He has worked tirelessly to plan and fundraise for our national-level chess event, Pawn Wise. To this effort Roger has put in countless hours on a multitude of tasks, from letter and email writing, to phone calls, to meeting with public officials, prospective sponsors, and local artisans, and so much more. Thanks Roger, hang in there, we will make it happen!

I would also like to mention that Chess Nova Scotia has been approached by Aris Marghetis, a tournament arbiter from Ontario, about participation in a “chess tour” in Canada, involving Western Canada, Ontario, and Atlantic Canada. This is a long-term project to build three super-tournaments that would be part of the CFC Canadian Closed and Zonals, which are qualifying events for the world chess championship cycle. The idea has the potential to significantly promote chess playing in our province. Chess Nova Scotia intends to lean into this opportunity going forward and help make it happen.

Also, locally we’ve heard from people in Truro and the valley in Nova Scotia who are interested in seeing tournaments run in their part of the province. This is very encouraging, as it is in complete alignment with our goal to bring chess to more Nova Scotians. Chess Nova Scotia would very much like to see tournaments take place outside of Halifax and we would fully support events being run in areas like Truro and the valley. We look forward to talking more about this in the new year when we can get a better idea of the impact of COVID-19 on our activities going forward.

## **Summary**

In summary, there is great potential for chess in Nova Scotia. We have a lot of talented volunteers working very hard to keep chess going here and build it for the future. Even our youth are volunteering and helping to make chess better for everyone, as we saw this summer with the Chess and Chat online session.

For now, though, we are sort of in a holding pattern due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are waiting and seeing. Going forward we will likely have to learn new ways of doing things, at least for a while, as we did with the virtual library lectures. Perhaps our tournaments in 2021 will have to be online. Fred McKim in P.E.I. has hosted several successful Lichess events in 2020, as has the NS Scholastic Association, with help from youth player Jerjis Kapra. We may end up doing the same. Online tournaments lend themselves to shorter time controls, but that is a reality that we might have to live with as we ride out the pandemic.

The senior's initiative and the afterschool program may also have to be done or at least started online. Again, it's hard to make plans for these initiatives as we don't know how long we will be impacted by COVID-19. I welcome your suggestions on how we can keep chess going in Nova Scotia in the absence of chess clubs and tournaments and the ability to meet face to face.

One thing we may need to do in the new year is develop a written plan for re-opening, with respect to implementing COVID-19 safety protocols at our tournaments; i.e., document how we plan to provide social distancing at our events, how we will go about cleaning the equipment, etc. I will look for help from the board in developing such a plan if we need one.

Going forward, the key to all of our plans and our ability to achieve them will be our people. For the first time in many years we've named a full board of directors, each with a particular focus area. We've also elected a new secretary and for the first time we've named a youth committee chair. All of our directors bring a diverse set of skills and experiences and a new drive to accomplish our objectives. Now, more than ever, we are in a position to get things done.

For the future of chess in our province, Chess Nova Scotia now has the organizational structure it needs and the right people in the right place. We're ready for the next chapter. Let's go make it happen.

Ken Cashin

President, Chess Nova Scotia