

# A UNIVERSAL GAME

Photography by Greg Grupenhof and Daniel Smyth



Until this school year, many of the students at Pleasant Hill Academy had never touched a chess board. On Friday, March 20th, they faced off against some of the world's greatest chess champions.

Since September 2014, the Cris Collinsworth ProScan Fund (CCPF) has been teaching second graders from Pleasant Hill the basics of chess through its Chess in Schools Program. Some of these students took an exciting leap in their chess careers when they participated in the Simultaneous Exhibition (Simul), which kicked off CCPF's 14th Annual Queen City Classic Chess Tournament (QCC).

Colorfully emceed by Cris Collinsworth, the Simul is the annual QCC opening event in which global, national and local chess experts, including International Grandmasters Maurice Ashley and Gregory Kaidanov, as well as local Master and attorney Russell Wilson, play up to 36 simultaneous chess games with young tournament participants. From the chess beginners of Pleasant Hill to the more practiced players of the Detroit City Chess Club, the Simul gives a wide range of students from across the Midwest the unique opportunity to interact and compete with chess celebrities.

Skill level is not the only difference among the students who participate in the Simul and the QCC itself. The annual tournament brings together young people from all backgrounds. "We wanted to provide a place for students of all ages, races, and socioeconomic statuses to learn chess and take away some of its more nuanced teachings: sportsmanship, patience and hard work," says QCC co-founder Corbin Pomeranz. "Chess is an equalizer," adds Cody Pomeranz, QCC co-founder. "It gives kids confidence and it raises their self esteem and it shows them that even if they don't have the resources they still have the potential to succeed."

Maggie Fennell, CCPF Executive Director, believes the drastically different experiences of the participating students is what make the QCC so special. The tournament creates a positive experience enjoyed by students from all walks of life. "The QCC not only provides these children an opportunity to enjoy a day in an NFL stadium," says Fennell. "It also levels the playing field for children of all backgrounds."

Cincinnati Bengals owner Mike Brown also appreciates the universality of the game. Brown, who received the 6th Annual Shining Knight Award at the Simul Reception, was recognized for his unwavering dedication to the Greater Cincinnati community, especially the younger generation, and for the Bengals' continued support of the Queen City Classic Chess Tournament. In his acceptance speech, Brown spoke to the children at the event and said that unlike the game of football, the game of chess is one you can play forever, at any age, in any part of the world, against anyone who knows how to play.

This same concept, that chess is a universal game, was the driving force behind the founding of the tournament. The idea for the QCC was born as the Pomeranz family was leaving a Bengals' game at Paul Brown Stadium. Brothers Corbin, Jory and Cody Pomeranz agreed that the stadium would be a great place to hold a chess tournament. "You couldn't architecturally design a better space for chess," says Jory Pomeranz, co-founder of the QCC. "Or maybe it simply seems that way due to the way the tournament has grown into the space."

While the physical game of football is different than the mental game of chess in a lot of ways, the similarities they saw between the two made the stadium an appealing venue for chess. "Your goal is to 'tackle' as many pieces as possible and eventually reach your oppo-





ment's side," notes Corbin. "It just seemed fitting to have two things so different in interaction but similar in content under the same roof."

Once they found the perfect venue, the Pomeranz family set out to put on the best tournament possible. "We created a tournament which keeps people engaged at all times," says Jory. "Grandmasters announcing games or teaching lessons to parents, people participating in simuls, we even had a sculptor carve a chess set out of cheese."

The popularity of the QCC is evident in the attendance. In its 14 years, the QCC has grown from 350 participants to a sold-out crowd of 700 players. The success of the tournament inspired CCPF to develop the Queen City Classic Chess in Schools Program. Through this program, CCPF teaches the game of chess in Greater Cincinnati schools during both the school day and after-school programs. With 19 schools now participating, Chess in Schools promotes chess with the same reasoning and passion as the tournament.

"Chess is cool!" exclaims CCPF co-founder Penny Pomeranz. "It begins and ends on a handshake and teaches kids there are consequences for their actions. It teaches patience and makes you think and focus, which helps you in everyday life."

Since this past September, the students of Pleasant Hill Academy have been learning these lessons with 30 minutes of chess instruction every Friday. Seven months later, they can say they've played with an International Grandmaster. ❖

Cris Collinsworth ProScan Fund is located at 5400 Kennedy Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45213. You can reach them at 1.866.PSCHESS (772.4377) or visit their website at [www.queencityclassic.org](http://www.queencityclassic.org).

