

Alex Niedzwiedzki

Alex was born on Christmas Eve, 1924, in a part of Poland, that is now the Ukraine. After a chequered life in World War Two, during which he escaped from the Germans, he was recaptured and made to work in a large railway marshalling yard in Austria, which became a target for the Allied bombing raids. Subsequently, he was captured by the advancing American troops and interned. After being "processed" he joined the Free Polish Army, stationed in Northern Italy. When hostilities ceased he was classified as a stateless person, and offered the opportunity to go to either the U.S.A or U.K: Alex chose the latter.

He eventually settled at Amersham in Buckinghamshire, where he met and married Mary, who has always quietly supported his activities, and raised a family. He also started his TV sales and repair business in Bourne End, which he ran until they retired to Norfolk in 1984. Naturally he joined the local Chess Club at Amersham, where his enthusiasm and playing strength, allied to his knack of making friends and organizational skills, resulted in him becoming Club Captain. The club flourished under his captaincy, and won the County League Championship four times. He was at the same time also a member of the High Wycombe club until the mid 60's, becoming club champion. Later he became friendly with John Sharp, the Berkhamsted club and Herts captain, and they formed a deadly duo, playing for "Berko" in the Herts League, and Amersham in the Bucks League.

Alex was twice joint winner of the County Individual Championship and many times champion of both High Wycombe and Amersham Chess Clubs. He was top board for many years for the County Correspondence Chess Team, and in 1962/63 season was awarded the Boyd Prize for the best played game.

Alex was elected the Bucks First Team Captain in 1976 and in the following five year period the County's playing strength rose to a point that it registered two wins against Middlesex (unheard of prior to this) and held its own quite comfortably in the first division of the S.C.C.U. inter-county competition. His influence continued and in 1981 Bucks won the Minor Counties Championship of the B.C.F. (as it was called then), almost repeating the feat again in 1983. According to reports of this period, the improvement in the team's performance was due to Alex's captaincy in two ways:

- a) He was able to persuade most of the county's strongest players to turn out regularly and
- b) By his own personality he developed a team spirit which brought the best out of the team, individually and collectively.

Not content with that, Alex in conjunction with other members of the Bucks and Berks Chess Associations, initiated and organized the annual August Bank Holiday Chess Congresses, first held at Sir William Borlase's School at Marlow. He continued to be closely involved from the first congress in 1964 right through to 1983. His "Black to moof... White to moof..." tape for the ten second tourney was always a source of amusement and pleasure. It was acknowledged that a vast amount of work was contributed by Alex, and to many observers it appeared that Alex hardly went to bed during the congresses. His retirement to Norfolk exposed this, as the Congress could not be held in 1984, through lack of organisers, although others have ensured continuity since.

In 1981/82, Alex masterminded the organization that went into the Bucks Chess Association Golden Jubilee Celebrations; which included chess matches against teams from Kent and Bedfordshire, a simultaneous match against juniors, a team lightning tournament, plus a one day congress. The culmination was a formal Dinner in Amersham.

Always keen to promote chess, Alex established good relations with the local Bucks Free Press newspaper and persuaded them to sponsor an individual knock-out tournament, which ran for two or three years, with the final being held in High Wycombe town hall.

In recognition, Buckinghamshire County Chess Association made Alex a Life Honorary member. In addition he was made an honorary vice-president of Bucks, succeeding to the Presidency, on the death of Harry Golombek in 1995. He took this office very seriously, and initiated and funded the President's Prize, awarded annually to for outstanding services or performance for chess in Bucks. He also attended AGMs whenever possible, usually when it was possible to time the meeting to coincide with his visit to the annual gathering of the national Polish Association at Fawley Court, Henley on Thames, where among other things, he organised the PA system, a function he also regularly fulfilled for religious events at Little Walsingham, to where he and Mary moved on retirement.

Inevitably Alex joined Fakenham Chess Club. He also from this time supported Norfolk County Chess Teams and until recently played in all of the County's Tournaments. During this time he underwent a heart bypass operation at Papworth Hospital but as soon as his health allowed, he was back playing for County and Club.

Whilst he always strove for his teams and himself to win over the board, Alex is still a shining example to young players on how to conduct themselves, whether winning or losing and Buckinghamshire's loss was Norfolk's gain. He well-deserved the ECF President's award for services to chess in 2008.

This account is an amended version (by FGD) of the Norfolk (Barry Hollyoak of Fakenham Chess Club) submission to the ECF (Aug 2008) proposing Alex as recipient of the ECF President's award for individual services to improve the standard of chess at all levels. Barry acknowledged Buckinghamshire County Chess Association's contribution to the original version (probably by Alan Cox?) for the account of Alex Niedzwiedski's involvement in 'Chess' matters within that county.