

The Newcomer's Guide to Scholastic Chess in Southern Arizona

by David Carter, St. Ambrose

¡Bienvenidos! Hundreds of students meet regularly every year at tournaments sponsored by the Southern Arizona Chess Association (SACA). Whether you're a student, coach, parent, or other relative, we hope you will welcome what we have to offer.

SACA is a not-for-profit organization run by volunteers. The Eastside Chess Club meets on Wednesdays from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Jewish Community Center (JCC) southeast of River Road and Dodge Boulevard. As many as 60 players of all ages meet every week. Please drop by.

During the school year our scholastic volunteers host chess matches every three to five weeks. We're dedicated to helping students learn about chess because it's fun, challenging, and healthy mental exercise for all of us. To that end we run several kinds of tournaments:

League Matches are our staple, and we have five every year. The entry fee for each match is \$5 per player for three games against players from other schools. Most of the matches have a team format with trophies for the best teams, but we also offer individual medals and ribbons.

In chess lingo, each round is usually "Game in 40." That actually means that the game lasts up to 80 minutes with each player having 40 minutes.

Schools compete as teams. A team is composed of four players for a Junior High team, five players for an Elementary team, and three players for a Primary team. Each school can enter as many teams as it wants, except at the League Championship when only one team per division may play. If a school does not have a full team to enter, but makes the minimum number players required to enter, that team will have one automatic loss out of the total possible points for a team, being one point per player, in each round versus a full team.

Each team is seeded into sections based on its SACA rating (for more about ratings, see the article "[I had to play a big kid!](#)"). The sections rank from top to bottom – Premier, Gold, Silver, Bronze, Copper, Iron, and possibly Tin.

The strongest player on each team plays its first board and will face the strongest player from the other teams. The second-best players play the second board, and so forth. Pairings for each round list the seating assignment for just the first board. The other players take their places at the next boards. If the first board plays white, second board will play black, etc.

Whether it's the first board or the last board, a win is worth one point and a draw, half a point. No matter the position, every player has a chance to help his team in every round. The winless player who ekes out draw in the third round may still contribute the vital half point that counts for a higher team finish. Losses are scored as zero points.

Trophies are usually awarded to the top three teams in the Premier section, and to the top two teams in the other sections. In other words, in competing against similarly rated teams, each team has at least a 25 percent shot at bringing home some hardware.

USCF Matches are sanctioned by the U.S. Chess Federation which publishes the monthly magazine *Chess Life*. Players must be USCF members. The entry fees are \$12 or higher, but that covers four, five, or more rounds with tougher competition and often longer rounds than in League Matches. The following scholastic events are USCF tournaments except for the Southern Regional Championship:

- Tucson Scholastic Warm-up. Early September. Four rounds. Game/40. Trophies and medallions for the top four players in each division of eight to sixteen students.
- Arizona School Grade Championship. Early January. Four rounds. Game/60. By grade: K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7-8, & 9-12. Trophies for all kindergartners and to the five top teams and 10 top players in most grades. Medals for other players with three points.
- Southern Regional Championship. Early March. Five rounds. Game/40. Four sections: K-1, K-3, K-6, K-8. Trophies for top players, teams. This event is also the first Southern Arizona Regional Qualifier (RQ1) for the Arizona Pre-High School State Championships, which folks often call the “State Championships”, or simply “State.” Players scoring beyond a certain level qualify to play in the State Championships.
- Tucson Scholastic Championship. Late March or early April. Five rounds. Game/40. Four sections: K-1, K-3, K-6, K-8. Trophies to all players with 4 points or better. Medallions to other players with 3 or 3.5 points. Team trophies to top five schools in each section. This is the second Southern Arizona Regional Qualifier (RQ2) for the State Championships. Players scoring beyond a certain level qualify to play in the State Championships.
- Arizona Championships. Late April. Five rounds Game/40 1st day & three rounds Game/60 the next day. K-3, K-6, K-8. Team & individual trophies. The official name of this event is the “Arizona Pre-High School State Championships,” but people often call it just the “State Championships,” or simply “State.”
- National Championships. Usually in early April. Seven rounds over three days. Multiple formats and usually multiple sites for grade school, junior high, and high school. Team, individual & other trophies.