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Passion takes chess player to top

Laura Wylde
Staff

“Capital graduate takes 7th in national chess competition”



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Vellotti, 17, took seventh place in the 2002 Scholastic Grade School Championship national chess competition held December 13-15 in Atlanta, Georgia.

The tournament drew 2,103 players, Vellotti said. Players competed in categories based on grade level. Vellotti played in the 12th-grade competition.

"A lot (of the kids at the tournament) were players I had played before, so they were all old friends we got to meet again," he said.

Vellotti said he hasn't recently devoted much time to chess, so his success in the tournament came as a surprise.

"I haven't been studying as hard," he said. "Winning blew my mind I didn't think I'd do that well at all, because I've been out of the loop."

He explained that, to be "in the loop," a person would play about one tournament a month. Vellotti has played five competitions in the past year and a half.

"Chess is just like any other activity -- you need to stay in shape," he said. "If you don't, the chess teachers would say your skill is getting fat."

Vellotti said he opted for home-schooling to give him more time for chess. He graduated from Capital High School, which he attended part time because he missed his friends, he said. He also enrolled for classes at Boise State University at age 14.

"My educational history is definitely different," he said. "I wanted to have time to do the things I want to be doing, while getting a good education at the same time."

Vellotti then developed his own chess club, The Master's Academy, in 1999. He said the group quickly developed into an intense club, training students for competition. He coaches about 40 members per week. Vellotti also works with students in area schools. He has since renamed the club Vellotti's Chess Kids.

His teaching strategy imitates his perspective of the game.

"Chess is no fun if it loses its sparkle," he said. "I like to impart to my students a love for the game."

He tutors students on the ethics of chess, teaching them to respect their opponents and to win or lose gracefully.

He teaches by telling stories rather than by lecturing his students.

"Kids listen to a story, and they learn that way," Vellotti said. "In that way, I can train children as young as 4."

Cutline: Daniel Vellotti, 17, placed seventh in the U.S. Chess Federation's 2002 Scholastic Grade School Championship tournament in Atlanta this year. Vellotti competed in the 12th-grade section of the national tournament. "I was so shocked I did this well," he said.