

April 2, 2007 ~ Section: Local ~ Page: 01

## Playing to Win

*Debbie Bryce*

*Staff*

“Vellotti’s Chess Kids Spotlight”



Katie Patterson – 1st Place Top Unrated - \$50 Prize Money  
~ Vellotti’s Kids Chess Student ~

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*Staff*

POCATELLO — From the event’s youngest competitor, Luke Harmon, 8, of Boise, to seasoned gamesman Don Yeaman, 75, of Pocatello, chess players in the Idaho Open came to win this weekend. Harmon, a second-grader at Shadow Hills Elementary in Boise, said his dad taught him to play about four years ago, and he added that he always plays to win.

Luke’s dad, Daniel Vellotti, a chess coach and competitor in the Idaho Open, said Harmon learned the game quickly.

“I didn’t have to push him,” Vellotti said. “He’s got the drive and the ambition to go where he wants to go.” Vellotti said he learned the game after he found an old board in his grandmother’s house.

“She taught me to move the pieces and from there my passion just grew,” he said. Vellotti said chess requires critical thinking skills that he believes helped his son to excel in school. Harmon is presently being considered for an advanced math program that would place the elementary student at a junior high level.

Harmon, who also plays the violin, said when he's not playing chess, he enjoys playing basketball and computer games.

Nine-year-old Katie Patterson, a relative newcomer who learned the game just one year ago, said she plays about five hours a week. The Idaho Open, held on the Idaho State University campus, was the first rated tournament of her career.

Her father, Kevin Patterson, said his daughter now has an instructor (Daniel Vellotti) to help hone her skills.

Katie, a third-grader at Rolling Hills Elementary School in Boise, said that the strategy involved in playing the game appeals to her.

John Walters, who competed for the first time in more than a decade this weekend, said his son is responsible for getting him back into tournament play. "I played in school, then I played with my son, then he lost interest," said Walter of Idaho falls. "Now he's interested again so here I am."

Director Jay Simonson said the two-day tournament drew 30 players from Idaho, Utah, Wyoming and Montana.

The chess players paid an entry fee and competed for ratings and cash.

Simonson, who started playing chess when he was 12, said world attention on the game, along with players like world champions Vladimir Kramnik and Garry Kasparov renewed interest in the game.

During the Idaho Open, sponsored by the Idaho Chess Association, players each had 90 minutes to win a game.

"If you run out of time, you lose," Simonson said. "Many grand masters lost tournaments because they ran out of time."

He said anyone can learn to play chess, but it takes time and dedication to master the game.

Alex Langrell, 15, a sophomore at Capital High School in Boise, said he never liked the game.

"My dad taught me to play and I always played with my dad and he always beat me," Langrell said. "I was more of a 'checkers king.'"

But he said the first time he defeated another opponent, he was hooked.

Chris Viveros, 17, of Twin Falls, said he struggled during the Idaho Open. "I got beat by Luke Harmon and he's 8," said the Twin Falls High School junior. "We just compete to play."