

Warren Stenberg

Warren Stenberg was an active player in Minnesota chess events stretching from the early 60s to early 90s. He maintained an expert's rating over a span of years and participated in the state championship playoffs three times.

But although he was well-known as a player, it was Warren's role in chess organization, and in particular in the great changing of the guard in the mid 1970s, for which he deserves to be remembered and admired. Warren isn't around to nominate himself to the Hall of Fame, and wouldn't do so in any case. It is for that dwindling pool of individuals who were there and remember the events of that time to do it for him.

In the mid 1970's, the MSCA was facing a crisis. Membership was declining. The financial position of the organization had become precarious. The Minnesota Chess Journal (MCJ) was barely being published. The Twin Cities Chess League had languished.

Those running the MSCA at the time had entrenched themselves, as indeed those in charge of institutions the world over are wont to do. Among other things, this particular entrenchment took the form of increasing the size of the MSCA Board to the ludicrous number of 19, of whom only 6 were elected by the membership at large and in any meaningful way accountable to it. It was a situation rife for political manipulation.

But to replace the management and restore sanity to the administration of the MSCA was no easy matter. Those in charge liked their positions, and liked the existing governing arrangements. They were prepared to fight to keep things that way.

Someone had to step forward to rectify this situation. Someone did. Warren Stenberg volunteered to take over the publishing of the MCJ, a difficult and time-consuming task in an era before the Internet and personal computer. Warren and a slate of several other reform directors challenged the existing board. At an acrimonious annual meeting of the membership in 1976, the facts were laid before an incredulous audience, and the reform slate was elected. But it was not over. There followed a year of bitter, divided governance, in which the 6 members of the reform slate, aided by a few others from the 13 non-elected directors, struggled with the old management. Things got ugly. Four members of the reform slate resigned as a result of the poisonous atmosphere. Throughout, Warren was the lightning rod in the storm, the de facto leader of the reformers and focus of the wrath of the old regime. The MCJ continued to be published, informing the membership of the proceedings. A special meeting of the membership was called in late 1976, and the constitution was amended to bring the Board back to a sane size of 7 members, all elected annually by the membership. By the annual membership meeting in 1977, Warren and the survivors among the reformers had ousted the old regime.

There followed a period of relatively wise management of the MSCA. Warren stayed on as MCJ editor another year or so, and continued to contribute on a regular basis long thereafter. Warren re-invigorated the Twin Cities Chess League with the appointment of two new directors. Warren guided the rebirth of the University of Minnesota chess club, providing the MSCA with another useful venue for events. Most importantly, Warren recruited new blood to keep the organization running, because turnover is always high in an organization run by volunteers. Although his name was not always prominent when it came to assigning titles, when courage and wisdom were needed, he was there. Let his contribution not be forgotten.