

2018 Minnesota Chess Hall of Fame Inductee: George Barnes

Although the induction of George Barnes in the Minnesota Chess Hall of Fame could be fully justified by either his accomplishments as a player or contributor, he will always be primarily remembered for his achievements over the chess board. First and foremost, Mr. Barnes captured 11 Minnesota State Championship titles, which was of course far and away the record at the time. Now, 66 years after his last term as State Champion, this record has still only been matched or eclipsed by two other players. Also to be taken into consideration is the fact that he won these titles over a span of 21 years, from 1931 to 1951. Barnes's reign as the dominant player of the Minnesota chess scene has only been matched by Curt Brasket.

The Elo rating system did not come into existence until 1951, and was therefore unable to record Barnes's playing strength during his prime. That year, his last as State Champion, Barnes's rating reached 2236. However, the USCF has used an extrapolation of Elo's system to award the Master Emeritus title to a select group of players for whom it could be demonstrated would have held a master's rating over an extended period of time. In May of 1975, Barnes was honored with the awarding of the Master Emeritus title by unanimous vote of the USCF policy board.

Mr. Barnes was also a regular participant at the annual Minnesota-Manitoba Match, where he typically played on first board. Before coming to Minnesota, Barnes had previously been Kansas State Champion and University of Michigan Champion. What is often cited as his finest performance occurred in 1932, when he placed fifth at the Western Open. This tournament was the forerunner of the U.S. Open, and that year's event was held in Minnesota and sponsored by Barnes himself. His finish left him below the likes of Reuben Fine and Samuel Reshevsky, but placed him above Chicago's Sam Factor and other nationally prominent players.

Though not so well known as his exploits as a player, Barnes was also a major contributor to Minnesota chess through his organizing and sponsorships. A co-founder of the great Minneapolis Chess Club (then located in the Lumber Exchange Building), Barnes provided personal and financial support to many chess projects and events. He served as president of the MSCA six times in the years from 1939 to 1961. After Barnes ultimately left Minnesota for retirement in Florida, his final gift to Minnesota chess came in the form of a \$1,000.00 check made out to the MSCA. This donation, a lot of money for its time, was the largest such gift the MSCA had ever received up to that point.