

2020 Minnesota Chess Hall of Fame Inductee:

Nels Truelson

Nels Truelson, MSCA's 4th Life Member, served the first of many terms on its Board of Directors at age 16, becoming a fixture of the Minnesota chess scene. Editor of the Minnesota Chess Journal in 1973, he later acted as its game annotations editor from 1986 to 1988. Nels also directed the Twin Cities Chess League for three seasons, and assisted with the organizing and directing of numerous tournaments over the decades, including considerable work with Larry Lampert and his School Chess Association. In the latter half of the 1970s, Nels reestablished the then defunct University of Minnesota Chess Club, and along with Warren Stenberg, revived the annual U of M Student-Faculty match. The kickoff for this event included Nels's first public blindfold chess simul (8 boards), a concept employed frequently thereafter.

More prominent was Nels's over-the-board career. In 1970, he became Minnesota's first Junior High School student to reach Class A. That summer Nels was awarded the Top 15-Year-Old trophy at the U.S. Junior Open. Over the years, Nels captured many state-wide titles in Minnesota, including Junior High School Co-champion, two High School championships, two State Junior (under 21) championships, six State Exurban championships, two Minnesota State Open championships, and one time as Minnesota State Champion. He also enjoyed success in those open tournaments considered Minnesota's "major" events. Except for the Region VI Championship, in which he had to be satisfied with 2nd and 3rd place finishes, Nels won the St. Paul Winter Carnival Open, Minneapolis Open, Aquatennial Open, Trans-Mississippi Open, and Northern Open, all with clear first finishes. Nels was also active in collegiate chess. As Princeton University Champion, he led his team to first place at the 1975 Eastern Intercollegiate Championship, where he scored a perfect 5-0 on Board 1. Later, he played with his brother Roy and others for the highly successful University of Minnesota team.

Nels participated in the Minnesota State Championship Playoffs in 1977, the first of 12 such appearances. While only winning the state title once, he had many "near misses." Six of the other 11 times he was within one victory of at least sharing the title. However, his most dominant performances occurred during the two-years from February 1986 through March 1988, a period bookended by two consecutive win streaks. This began with the 1986 Minnesota State Open, which he won 6-0, and then took the early lead in the playoffs. This first streak boasted the defeat of Minnesota four highest rated players, and included the 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1989 State Champions (Nels was 1988 State Champion). This period was then punctuated by his 9-0 victory at the 1988 Minnesota State Championship playoffs, where he faced seven masters and two experts, again including past, present, and future state champions.

Nels moved to South Dakota in 1999, where he has been state champion a record 12 times. In 2018, he tied for second at the U.S. Senior Open, and after waiting 48 years since his U.S. Junior age prize, finally took home the plaque for the 60-64 year-old age group. Nels has continued to maintain ties with Minnesota chess, playing not only in tournaments periodically, but also travelling for TCCL matches, where his team won Silver and Gold divisional titles.