

## Hall of Fame Induction: Acceptance Speech



by FM Kapil Chandran

*(Pictured left at 2023 Pan American Collegiate Team Championship)*

Thank you all for being here. I honestly never thought I would end up in the hall of fame of anything, so it's an honor to be inducted into the Connecticut Chess Hall of Fame today. I want to thank the entire CSCA board of directors, and especially President Alex Lumelsky for organizing this event, as well as so many other great chess events over the past years. I'm a grad student in Chicago these days, so every few months when Alex messages me about an exciting upcoming tournament in Connecticut, I have to reply with a sigh that I can't make it. I'm glad to finally be able to attend one of these great events.

As I look back over the years, chess has played vastly different roles at different times in my life.

As an elementary schooler, I devoured all things chess with a voracious appetite. The 64 squares felt like a dense jungle laden with hidden secrets and treasures. Though the jungle was mysterious and difficult to navigate, gradually, day by day, I understood it better. Every Tuesday I was giddy to play with my peers at the afterschool chess club. Every few months a tournament rolled around and I felt unparalleled excitement.

As my middle school years approached, I faced my first ever chess slump, and started to lose interest in the game. Despite practicing and practicing, my rating only seemed to go down. For years I had prided myself on being one of the top chess players for my age in the nation. That status seemed to be slipping away. A turning point for me came at the 2009 US Chess School, a summer camp for talented youth players. Here my love of chess was reinvigorated by meeting other kids so passionate about the game. Their enthusiasm was infectious, and I realized that they weren't my competitors—forever trying to dethrone me from top rating list—but my friends—people with whom I could laugh about crazy bughouse games, stay up all night doing chess puzzles, and share tips and tricks.

As high school rolled around, I had some of my best chess successes. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I cracked National Master and was crowned national co-champion. In 9<sup>th</sup> grade I won the Denker Tournament of High School State Champions as a freshman. In 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I was fortunate enough to represent the US at the World Youth Championships, tying for 10<sup>th</sup> place. Later in high school, chess started to take a backseat to academics and my newfound passion for math. And that was okay. I no longer felt pressure to be the best. Chess was and would always be my favorite pastime, and nothing could take that away from me.

In college I was perennially busy with schoolwork, social events, and the whirlwind that living on your own for the first time can be. But every Friday night I gathered with my friends in the creaky old building that housed the Princeton Chess Club. For two hours, all my stresses and

worries melted away, and I immersed myself in chess with friends. We would jump straight into blitz and bughouse, share puzzles and endgame studies, and discuss top tournaments.

In grad school at UChicago, things have come full circle. Growing up, I was always the youth playing against more experienced adults. Now, in a way that still feels foreign to me, half the time I'm playing against a kid much younger than I am. In fact, I'm even learning from my juniors every week at the UChicago Chess Club. While I was the top dog at Princeton, I'm number three at UChicago, squarely behind two young grandmasters with whom I've become good friends.

Hopefully I haven't bored you too much by this point with my life story in chess. You may be wondering why some people spend so much of their lives staring at these 64 squares and 32 pieces. For me, I think the answer is that I've discovered an incredible community through chess. I believe community is the theme linking all of my chess experiences. From many different chess clubs, to summer camps, to skittles rooms at tournaments, I treasure my experiences with this community. Even when I'm bored with chess, and haven't thought much about the game in months, I'm always happy to jump right back in and play blitz or bughouse with friends. So my advice to you all is to make sure you stop and smell the roses. It's not about the destination, but the journey, and especially the people you meet along the way.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge some of the people active in Connecticut chess who have helped me along my journey.

I would never be where I am today without my first ever chess coach, Mike Zadorozny, as well as the rest of the team at the American Chess Teachers Association (ACTA): Robert Holyfield, Alex Eydelman, and Harold Stenzel. They all had an infectious passion for chess which had a greater influence on me than they could have possibly known.

After nearing the level of my previous coaches, I started training with Grandmaster Sergey Kudrin, a living legend of Connecticut chess who is a fellow Hall of Fame inductee today, as well as Grandmaster Ildar Ibragimov, a gentle and insightful player with a deep understanding of the game.

I credit Grandmaster Mikheil Kekelidze for helping me break out of a three-year rating slump during middle school and finally reach National Master. Among many things, I thank him for being the first coach to seriously help me learn openings.

I would also like to thank past CSCA directors David Aldi, John Fikiet, and Jim Celone for all they have done for Connecticut chess.

Finally, I would like to thank the team at the Chess Club of Fairfield County: Dan Lowinger, Ian Harris, and Melvin Patrick. They created a premier chess establishment—just minutes away from my home—filled with tournaments, lectures, classes, and more. I have many fond memories there. Melvin tragically passed away a few years ago, but I'm sure he was rightfully proud of what he helped build.

Thank you all.