

# Celebrating Chess: Clubs, Teams, and Organizers

*Last year, we ran an article celebrating the career of Eugene Salomon, a chess player of more than 80 year and “retired” New Jersey master. While he no longer plays serious chess, he has recently become an author of several articles. In light of the 50th anniversary of the Team, he wrote this article commemorating his experiences with team chess. Whether this is your first time on a chess team or you are a veteran of this (or any other) cooperative tournament, hopefully Eugene’s experiences and insight will inspire you to keep playing team chess.*

Upon returning from a beautiful vacation down memory lane in my native Spain last July, I gave a conference at the Toms River Chess Club on October 10th, 2019. I filled the conference with anecdotes from my 75+ year chess-career in Spain, Cuba, and the U.S. The primary focus, however, was on my 50-year journey in the U.S, starting with the 1968 New Jersey Open, which I entered as an unrated player and exited with a master’s rating. My very first game in the U.S. was the most emotional chess game of my life. My father, who taught me how to play as a child, had just died, and after 16 years retired from chess, I felt that I had to play again! I played the tournament, and especially the first game, with a mental intensity that I have not experienced in any of my other hundreds of tournament’s matches. \*



Left to right: Gene Salomon and his friend Dr. Richard Lewis (picture credit to Stephen Shoshin)

At the conference, I was introduced by my friend of 50 years, Dr. Richard Lewis. He is a chess teacher with 36 years of experience who volunteers to teach underprivileged children in Africa. At the end of the conference, I shared with Rich a crazy idea: this coming February is the 50th anniversary of the World Amateur Team Tournament---what about entering a team of old friends who witnessed the first one back in 1970?

2020 should be a year of half century celebrations, especially for New Jersey and for those of us who have been active in chess during the last 50 years. There is much to celebrate, and I was privileged to participate in New Jersey chess from the days of the Westfield Chess Club’s



From left to right: Joe Graves, Wayne Conover, GM John Fedorowicz, FM Mark Pinto, Gene Salomon, and Steve Pozarek. (Photo credit to Steve Pozarek.)

dominance in the 1970s under the great organizer Denis Barry to the Toms River Chess Club celebrating its 56th anniversary in 2020.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the unsung heroes—the chess organizers who make things happen. Steve Doyle is a legendary, living example: he was one of the pioneers at the Toms River Chess Club, where he was able to organize conferences and exhibitions by true chess giants. For the last 30+ years, he has been directing the monumental World Amateur Team Tournament which will, I’m sure, become his legacy.

Over the years, my favorite experience in chess has been playing on a variety of teams. For the last couple of years, I have enjoyed writing articles sharing my cherished memories.

During my last 52 years as a chess player, coach, and lecturer in the U.S., my path and Steve’s have crossed many times. Because team play and friendships in chess often go together, I will share with you some anecdotes of my 75+ years of chess life as part of many chess teams and pleasant memories of several team tournaments I played in the U.S.

I played on my first chess team in 1943 as “the child chess prodigy” of my hometown—Gijon, Spain—against

arch-rival Oviedo. The organizer of the event was a legendary figure, Felix de las Heras, who went on to organize the Gijon International Tournament from 1944-1965, where I met and interacted with my idol, Alekhine. Felix Heras would, years later, become the President of the Spanish Chess Federation and a Vice-President of FIDE.

The last chess team of which I was a member, just as I was ready to retire from competitions, was in 1997. It was at the US Amateur Team, where I competed alongside my friends Steve Pozarek (a past NJ Open Champion) and Wayne Conover (a past member of the U.S Olympic Correspondence chess



Gijon 1944- Banquet honoring Alekhine after the Gijon First International, from left to right: Felix de las Heras, the author and Alekhine. (Photo credit to Gene Salomon).

team). The organizer of the event was, of course, Steve Doyle. In 2014, I had an emotional visit at the tournament with my chess teammates and friends from the early 1970's, which we captured in the memorable picture above:

During my 19 years of life in Spain (of which I spent five or six playing chess), 13 years of life in Cuba (only one playing chess), and 59 years of life (30 years of chess as a player) in the U.S., I had the good fortune of being a member of five historic clubs: El Casino in Gijon, Maudes in Madrid, Club Capablanca in Havana, the Westfield Chess Club in New Jersey, and the Toms River Chess Club in New Jersey. I cherish memories of these clubs. One common thread is my participation in their teams:

- El Casino – 1943 Gijon team, which soundly defeated rival Oviedo
- Madrid – 1947 Maudes team, the champions of Castille
- Havana – 1952 team champions (Cubaneleco Club)
- Havana – 1952 Capablanca Chess Club's team, playing against a strong Central American team in San Salvador
- Westfield, N.J.—Westfield Chess Club's team, which won the New Jersey Chess League throughout the 1970s and 80s.

### My Writing

Two and a half years ago, I had a unique and inspiring three-hour interview, in Madrid, with the Spanish historian and writer Miguel Angel Nepomuceno, who honored me by writing a series of biographical articles about me in his column at the Zandalibros web publication \*\*. That interview inspired me to become a writer. Since then, I have written several articles (always in both Spanish and English). The book *The Gijon International Tournament—1944-1965* by Luis and Pedro Mendez Castedo was recently published in English by McFarland. In a way, it is a testimonial to both Alekhine and Heras. During the first such tournament in 1944, I acted as a “gofer” for the organizers, interacting with Alekhine, and later participated as a player in the Gijon IV International in 1947. To write the foreword to this English edition of the book and to contribute with photos and anecdotes, after more than 70 years, was indeed a pleasure.

I hope that someday, there will be a book about the legacy of another exceptional chess organizer, my friend Steve

Doyle, and his 40+ years of dedication to the Team.

The E-Book *40 Years of Friendship—100 Games of Chess* that I wrote with co-authors Steve Pozarek and Wayne Conover has a lot of information about clubs and teams. Following is a paragraph from the prologue, which was written by Steve Pozarek, that shows how deeply rooted we have become in New Jersey chess:

“Our 40-year friendship started when we became teammates at the Westfield Chess Club in the early 1970s. Our team won the North Jersey League for many years in a row, and – as they reminded me – I was the team's captain during that time. They further argued that there is a lot of New Jersey chess history contained in the following pages, and as the only NJ state champion among the three of us, I am a special part of that history. Ultimately, a lot of this book is about team chess and team chess tournaments, and they knew that I was twice a member of the winning team at the U.S. Amateur Team Championship. So... I was elected!”

Commenting on the history of Westfield and Toms River, my friend and co-author Wayne Conover reminds me that he was part of the original Toms River Team under Steve Doyle's banner when they met, and they tied against Denis Barry's legendary Westfield Team in the early 1970s.

Steve Pozarek, my other co-author, who was a winner of the tournament twice, reminded me that he also won a prize for the best family team, playing with his father and his uncle, and I was an honorary member of the Pozarek Family.

### Final Thoughts

This article, while a good start, is not even close to enough to talk about all of the great things in New Jersey chess. In late April, I will be moderating another panel at the Tom's River Chess Club. This time, it will cover all of the chess clubs that I have enjoyed over my 30 years of chess in New Jersey. If nothing else, it will help me fulfill a promise to Steve Doyle: last year after a lecture at our club, I vowed to break the club record for oldest speaker at age 92. With the above event, I will accomplish this. I will moderate, Steve Doyle will be the keynote speaker, and Glen Peterson, Rich Lewis, Dr. Leroy Dubeck, and Pete Tamburro will also be

sitting on the panel. The event will be called “Memories- Half a century of Chess in New Jersey.” The video-taped panel discussion will take place at Toms River Town Hall in the Community Room on April 23rd at 7:00 P.M. We look forward to your attendance to help us celebrate 50 years of chess in New Jersey!

\*You can see the game at <http://www.historiadelajedrezespanol.es/visor/pozarek-salomon.htm>

\*\*You can read the article at <https://www.zendalibros.com/eugenio-salomon-rugarcia/>

\*\*\* You can read the English versions at <http://www.historiadelajedrezespanol.es/articulos/salomoneng.htm>



I am proud that Steve Doyle and I both share the “honor roll” with Botvinnick, Tahl, Petrosian, Korchnoi, Kamsky, Caruana, and other luminaries. (Photo credit to Steve Shoshin).



Left to right: Steve's father, Joe Pozarek, Steve Pozarek, Frank Pozarek (Steve's uncle), and the author (photo credit to Steve Pozarek).