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Change of the guard at chess tournament

Last year, it was the year of the veterans. This year, it was the year of the youth. Last year's Quincy delegation to the Waypoint Foundation's annual chess tournament in Ephrata was senior-heavy, with students like Cyril Berndt and Travis Harris leading the way for then-junior Gates Petersen and an exchange student from Thailand. This year, Petersen and Cyril's younger brother Gregory Berndt, were the elder statesmen of the group, the only high-schoolers, while the other two-thirds of the Quincy group hailed from the junior high school.

Gregory's two older brothers have played in the tournament before, with Titus Berndt winning the tourney a few years back. Gregory went 4-1 on the day. Being the sibling of a former winner adds a little pressure to the day, he said.

Daisy Medina, Misael Garcia, Krista Kirk, all 13 years old, and 12-year-old Rodolfo Ramirez debuted at the tournament with varied results, but with one thing in common: They are all coming back next year.

"Chess is amazing," Garcia said.

Ramirez and Kirk showed up because they wanted to try something new, Garcia wanted to have some fun. Daisy Medina had the same reason to be there that Harris had last year.

"The money," she said laughing. Every player gets a little cash prize for playing, sometimes just a few bucks, which is just fine by Medina.

"Gotta save up for college, man," said Medina, an eighth-grader.

Someone for whom college is right around the corner relished playing in the tourney one last time. Petersen will graduate in June, and the tourney is open to K-12 students from Soap Lake, Moses Lake, Ephrata and Quincy school districts.

"I came in wanting to win, and then I saw some of the people returning from past years

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and I thought, 'these people are pretty good, I'm hoping (to go) 4-1,' and I got that," said Petersen, who left Ephrata about 75 bucks richer.

Petersen recommended the tournament to anyone hoping to enter.

"It's a fun time, you come out, play chess, make money, get free pizza," Petersen said. He started playing in the tournament three years ago and learned how to play chess much earlier.

"I played every once in a while when I was younger against my brothers, but they always beat me, so I didn't like it," he said.

While at the tournament, he got to dish out some of what he took during his younger years. The Swiss Pairing system sometimes pits teenagers against grade-schoolers. He's nice about it, though.

"I let them have fun, try to teach them sometimes, because they don't really know how to do it, so I try to help them along the way and let them take some pieces," he said.

"Then I checkmate 'em."

By Sebastian Moraga, sports@qvpr.com

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