

WISE MOVES: CHESS TOURNAMENT TEACHES LIFE LESSONS

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Joel Martin/Columbia Basin Herald Players face off in the second round of the 13th annual Waypoint Foundation Chess Tournament Saturday in Ephrata.

EPHRATA — It wasn't as raucous as a basketball game or a track meet, but the competition was just as serious at the Waypoint Foundation Chess Tournament Saturday.

Sixty-five kids turned out from Ephrata, Soap Lake and Moses Lake to face each other over the chessboards at Parkway Elementary School. There was room for 100 players, said Roger Pugh, one of the tournament's organizers, and attendance was down slightly from last year.

Roger and his brother Troy established the tournament 13 years ago in honor of their late brother Ryan, who was passionate about the game. The Pughs felt that the lessons learned by playing chess would build character in kids.

"We started this to teach kids the rules of life," Roger said. "When you make a move, it has consequences. Same as life."

The matches were set up in five rounds using what Troy Pugh called Swiss pairing. The winners of the first round play the other winners in the second, and losers are matched with losers. For the third round, the players with two wins under their belts take on other two-time winners, players with one win go up against the same, and so on. The fifth round is supposed to end about 5 p.m., at which time the playoffs start for the championship.

The audience consisted mostly of family, parents and siblings silently cheering on the players. And sometimes not so silent: toward the end of the first round Roger had to whistle sharply and remind a few younger spectators that chess requires concentration.

Casey Cooper of Ephrata was there to support his son Joshua, 18, who was playing round two against the friend he usually practices with. Joshua made "a couple of blunders" in his first round, Cooper said, but recovered to win the game.

"We love this tournament," said Sally Kaatz, whose grandson, 12-year-old Hayden Malone, also won his first round. "I don't know how to play chess myself, so I think it's really great that the grandkids do. This makes them use their brains."

Sixteen-year-old Koby Hines arrived too late to get into the tournament, but he managed to get into an informal game anyway, out in the hallway with Zach Knudsen of Soap Lake. Knudsen's daughter was inside competing, the only Soap Lake student there, he said.

In the end, the champion was Dricher Gesulga, a senior from Moses Lake, who took home the \$500 first prize. Falling to him in the final game was Ryan Pugh, Roger's son.

Roger was enthusiastic about the tournament, and said he especially enjoys seeing the kids come back year after year.

"It's just a real pleasure to be able to see some of the same kids," he said. "We were joking about one of the kids who's six-four. When he started coming to the tournament he was four feet tall. We grew up with them and enjoy seeing them year to year. It's almost sad when they graduate and don't come back."