

Lauzums goes 7-0 in Nashville



As 11-year-old Raimonds Lauzums played his way through the U. S. Chess Federation's National Elementary K-6 Bert Lerner Chess Championships in Nashville in May, he grew more and more excited. He was winning game after game.

Still, "I just focused," said Raimonds. "I just tried my best."

In the end, his best was a 7-0 record in the K-5 U900 division of the three-day event. After tie breaks based on strength of play were calculated, Raimonds finished in second place out of 394 players, behind New Yorker Zachary Martin. (Brian Dennis, from Lannon WI, finished third; Parker Sumwalt, from Mequon, tied for 30th place.)

"It felt good," Raimonds said of his performance, which earned him a huge trophy. "But it was kind of disappointing because I bet I could have beaten [Zachary], but didn't get a chance to play him."

Raimonds, a straight-A student, who will begin sixth grade at Whitefish Bay Middle School in the fall, began playing chess about six years ago with his Latvian grandfather. "Then he started doing WSCF tournaments, camps and classes, and all that helped him a lot," said his father, Gunner.

Raimonds, who also loves math, video games and soccer, has placed first in the Elementary K5 division of numerous WSCF tournaments, including the 2006 Miller Park Fall Classic, the Thomas Jefferson Middle School Fall 2006 Chess Tournament, the 2007 MacDowell Montessori Chess Tournament, the 2007 Sheboygan Christian School Chess Tournament, and the 2007 Schroeder YMCA Chess Club Chess Tournament.

Last winter, Raimonds began working once a week with Coach Leonid Aranovich. "Leonid brought him out of the 900 doldrums," said Gunner Lauzums. "He showed Raimonds just a couple of things he was doing wrong that increased his level by 200 points." Today, Raimonds plays at the 1200-1400 level.



"Raimonds is like a sponge – he takes everything in," says Aranovich. "He works hard and he never gives up, even when his position is not good. He's a fighter."

Aranovich, a mechanical engineer, is a chess expert who plays in one or two tournaments a year in the U2200 division. He teaches WSCF chess classes and coaches a local club as well as privately.

He said he specifically helped Raimonds become proficient with a greater variety of chess openings. The two also spend a lot of time analyzing Raimonds' games. "You want to find any problems and eliminate them," Aranovich said.

At nationals, each of Raimonds' games took about three hours, a scenario he described as challenging but fun. "Having to think 30 minutes or longer in a move about all the different variations of everything – it made me tired, but I liked it," Raimonds said.

During the tournament, Aranovich and Raimonds spoke by telephone after Raimonds had won his first five games. Typically, Aranovich said, when players get to that point in a major competition they are tempted to begin playing more conservatively in order not to lose their advantage.

Said Aranovich, "I told him, 'Raimonds, you're a young guy, you have nothing to be worried about. Play! Play like you always play. Have fun. Just relax.'"

Gunner Lauzums said it's been fun to watch Raimonds get better and better at chess. "He likes it a lot and wants to get good. How good he will get, we don't know. But for now, we're on the right track."

