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Roseburg chess hosts state high school tournament

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CHRIS GRAY

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Joshua Smith, right, Dylan Garoutte and the rest of the Sutherlin Chess Club play each other after competing at the 45th annual Oregon High School Chess Team Championships at Roseburg High School Saturday.

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JON AUSTRIA / N-R staff photo

Students from grades 6 to 12 compete at the 45th annual Oregon High School Chess Team Championships at Roseburg High School Saturday.

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Shane Calvert, right, of Roseburg High School faces off with Kennedy Anderson of Wilson High of Portland at the Oregon Chess Team Championships Saturday.

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The Oregon High School Chess Championships were held Friday and Saturday at Roseburg High School for the first time, reflecting a growing interest in the game in Douglas County, as well as the state.

Kate Taylor, the executive director of the high school chess championships, said participation in Oregon has gone up from 500 in 2005 to 3,000 students today. There were 250 students competing in the tournament at Roseburg.

◆Colleges are actively recruiting chess players,◆ Taylor said. ◆Kids that are good at chess are good at math.◆

Five years ago, there were no local high school chess teams.

Now, clubs have been established in Roseburg, Sutherlin, Oakland and Yoncalla, and the first three schools all competed Saturday.

◆The competition was really tough,◆ said Eric Abernathy, a senior at Sutherlin, who won a game and lost a game. ◆(Chess) really helps me keep organized and think things through before I act out.◆

His coach, Patrick Starnes, said the two Sutherlin teams of five ◆ varsity and junior varsity ◆ practice twice a week.

Anyone who wants to play can. These were their final matches of the year.

◆We◆ were the only 2A that came,◆ said Laura Storie, a senior at Oakland. Her school competed against the bigger schools. She lost a match to a Cottage Grove student and beat seventh-grader Chris Warren, who plays on the Sutherlin junior varsity.

In the silence of the cafeteria, you could hear a pin drop. Or a pawn move. The clock ticked without a sound.

His hair shaggy, Simon Blatz of The Dalles-Wahtonka High School leaned toward his chess table, defensively shifting his king back and forth as a seated, bespectacled Carson Viles of Willamette High School in Eugene went on the attack.

Blatz kicked a pawn away, then Viles swooped in with his bishop to take one for himself. Then pawns were swapped again.

A moment of pensiveness follows. The two of them sat back and scribbled some notes. The tall, lean Viles got up and paced around the table.

Play restarted. Viles moved his white king further and further right, plucking pawn after pawn, and Blatz followed each take with one of his own. But soon Viles was down to just a pawn and his king.

Blatz lost all his pawns, with only the bishop to support the king.

A bishop cannot checkmate by itself, and Viles◆ last pawn was boxed in by Blatz◆ bishop. After 90 minutes, it◆s called a draw.

Each school received half a point as they competed for second place in the Division 5A Championship.

◆That was a good game,◆ Blatz said after the match.

◆I was trying to play really aggressively and push on his queen◆s side and put him in a situation where he would have given up some of his pieces,◆ Viles said.

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◆ I just like the challenge it puts on your mind because you're constantly thinking what you're going to do and what your opponents are doing,◆ Storie said.

◆ You can reach reporter Chris Gray at 957-4218 or by e-mail at cgray@newsreview.info.

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