

RODELAY MEDINA, AMERICA'S SURPRISE HIGH SCHOOL CHAMP!

by Joe Ippolito - WSCC Spotlight, KasparovChess.com

The 2000 United States National High School Championships, held in Charlotte, North Carolina, from April 28-30, has been won by a dark horse from Miami, Florida's Jackson High School: Rodelay Medina. Rodelay was the unlikely victor in one of the strongest High School Championships in recent years. The event drew the participation of 10 masters and a women's international master from among the 95 teams and 1,395 players coming from 32 states. Ranked in lowly 15th place on the wallcharts was Rodelay, but when the dust settled at the end, there was Rodelay with his 2083 rating sitting in 1st place!

This result was no surprise to Rodelay's coach, Mario Martinez. "Rodelay, as well as the whole team, worked hard, were enthusiastic, and showed a lot of heart," stated Mario. (His result was also no surprise to us at KasparovChess.com for Rodney is the leader of his Jackson High School team that participates in the WSCC. We would like to think that his playing in our Internet competition honed his chess playing skills for this event!)

THE FORMULA FOR CHESS SUCCESS

What was Rodelay's formula for success that earned him the US National High School Championship? Playing many blitz games, going over the classic games of Morphy and Tal, and playing against stronger opponents. When time permitted, (Rodelay had to balance working and school), he read books by Tal and in particular valued "Fire On The Board" by GM Alexei Shirov. Rodelay admires Shirov's style of play because it mirrors his own. In fact, one of Rodelay's greatest dreams is to play Shirov.

Perhaps another reason for Rodelay's talent comes from the heritage of his country of birth, Cuba -- the land of Jose Capablanca. Rodelay was a 7-year old living in Cuba when he learned chess. At this age his game of choice was soccer, but what to do in the cold weather? Here his friends entered the picture and taught him how to play the game. However, it wasn't until Rodelay came to the US and enrolled in Miami's Jackson High School that Rodelay's spark of chess talent began to shine brightly, for it was there that met his current high school mentor, Mr. Martinez.

A METEORIC RISE

At the age of 16 he made his talents first known at the Chicago Open. He came in first in the Under 1600 category. This was a particularly thrilling and meaningful event for him to win for his friends, confident of his talent and skills, collected the money needed to pay for his trip and play in this tournament. The next tournament he played in was the World Open. His reputation preceded him in an unfortunate way for the tournament director required him to play in the Under 2000 section (even though his rating was in the 1500's). Although not coming in first, he had an outstanding performance. Following this was a heart-breaking result in the Florida State Scholastic

Championship. The humble Rodelay will always remember this tournament not for what he did right, but what he did wrong. The championship hinged on a rook and pawn endgame. A more experienced player would have played for a draw, but Rodelay went for the win instead and lost the championship as a result.

JUST A NORMAL KID - HATES MATH!

Rodelay still enjoys soccer, was the varsity kicker on the football team, and also enjoys swimming and badminton. His favorite school subject is science (but hates math!). He would someday like to be a teacher, because he likes working with kids.

Before we end, Rodelay would like to make known his appreciation of his coach, Mr. Martinez, for contributing to his success. "Mr. Martinez has confidence in me. He took the time to take me to tournaments and put me on the right track."

Mr. Martinez in turn would like to thank his school's administration, in particular Mr. Louis Allen, Jr. -- Principal of Miami Jackson High School, and the school's Vice Principal, Mr. Israel Katz. He also gives thanks to the Miami community which made it possible for the team to attend tournaments through their generous donations and lastly, to KasparovChess.com for the Internet World School Chess Championships. "It allowed our team to play right from our own school against teams from around the world. It was a great opportunity for our kids to make friends with kids from other states and countries. The idea and concept is fantastic and free."

