

## CHAPTER 43      Thrilling chess encounters in the new millennium

The standard of chess was reaching ever higher levels in Port Elizabeth primary schools in the new millennium, where coaching by active players from the public typically began at Grade 1 level. By contrast, Muir players received coaching from Grade 4 only. This situation began to reflect in the fortunes of Muir Primary chess players in tournaments in the early two-thousands. Meanwhile, senior players were dwindling in number as Friday afternoons had become the only available time for practices. It was nevertheless still feasible to put together teams of 'die-hards' to compete against other schools.

2003, however, proved to be the most successful year in a long time. Miss M Lingwood's senior team won 7 of their 8 matches in the First Reserve League. JP Strydom was the first senior player from Muir in many a year to be awarded his EP Colours. He played in various tournaments, including the USSASA championships and the EP Open Championships, and travelled to Pretoria to compete in the World Amateur Chess Championships and the Booster section of the SA Open Championships. Here he won 6 of his 9 matches, causing an upset of note in the ninth round. His Rating prize was a just reward for coming 11<sup>th</sup> out of 77 players. With an apparently insatiable appetite for tournaments, JP came 3<sup>rd</sup> in the U/20 age group and 6<sup>th</sup> overall out of 68 players in a tournament presented by the Rocking Rock Chess Club, and 7<sup>th</sup> out of 96 players at the Metropolitan Open. At the end of the year he represented the EP U/20 team to play at the national championships. In the same year the Primary Chess team achieved in the region of an 80% win ratio in their A League, a great improvement on the previous year.

In 2008 both the A and B Primary teams won their respective leagues, winning 7 out of the 9 matches played. Sven Stocklose, an Old Muirite and star player from the mid-1990s, had been coaching the Primary chess players for the past few years. Senior players Nathan Dennis, Lyndon Appel, Kurt Japtha, Lee Baatjes and Jarred Boscombe were selected for the EP team participating in the national tournament at the end of the year. It was therefore not unexpected that after some 18 years, Muir entered a senior team in the 'A' League in 2009, with some gratifying results: won 6, drew 1, lost 2. Grey and Brandwag proved tough nuts to crack in the League.

The senior B team were entered in the 'B' League, with more mixed results. Nathan Dennis, Lyndon Appel, Kurt Japtha, Lee Baatjes and Jarred Boscombe were once again selected for the Eastern Province team. The Primary A team did even better. After a shaky start, compounded by the departure of their coach Sven Stocklose, the team started a run of victories, beginning with 6-1 against Grey, and ending up with 7 wins, 1 draw and 1 loss (the first one, against the much fancied Handhaaf A). Not to be outdone, the Primary B team had the best winning ratio in the 'B' League, sometimes playing against A teams of opposing schools, and won their league. Both Muir teams (losing only to the talented Handhaaf sides) enjoyed an outstanding season in 2009. The Primary A team replicated their ratio of results in 2010. As with the previous season, they were indebted to Mr Jannie Saffier for his coaching services.

Three senior teams were entered into the various leagues in 2010 with a reasonable spread of results. This division of chess was benefiting from a regular inflow of good players from

the junior ranks each year. Some individual achievements in the 2009-2010 league were that Nathan Dennis came first in the PE U/18 Championships, Lyndon Appel was first in the EP U/18 Championships and Lee Baatjes gained second position in the Brandwag Tournament in the U/18 section. Furthermore, Baatjes and Jarred Boscombe were part of the EP U/16 B team which gained a silver medal at the National Championships, Alexander Jasson was in the EP U/14 team which also won silver, and Michael Bridger and the U/14 C team won gold at the same event. At the end of the year the EP U/18A team came first in the South African Junior Championships, with three Muir boys in the team – Nathan Dennis, Lyndon Appel and Lee Baatjes. For this singular achievement the boys were awarded Honours Blazers by the school. They were joined by Jarred Boscombe, Alexander Jasson, Kurt Japtha and Leaan Leibbrandt to make up the 2011 'A' Team. The Shtein Trophy for the Senior School Champion went to Lyndon Appel.

Teacher-in-charge of senior chess Miss M Lingwood reported in 2012 that a 'fairly large contingent of Primary school players moved up to grade 8 this year and as many of these players were involved in EP Chess and are very enthusiastic about their chess it was decided to enter 3 teams in the chess league'. The following table of results for the 'A' and 'B' teams reflected the relative strengths among schools in the 'A' section of the league:

<u>A. League</u>	Vs	Grey 'A'	won	4 – 3
	Vs	Collegiate	won	5 – 2
	Vs	Brandwag 'A'	lost	5 – 2
	Vs	Despatch	won	5½ - 1½
	Vs	Daniel Pienaar	won	7 – 0
	Vs	DF Malherbe	won	6 – 1
	Vs	Framesby 'A'	won	5 – 2

<u>B. League</u>	Vs	St George's	won	5 – 2
	Vs	Brandwag 'B'	won	6½ - ½
	Vs	Khwezi Lomso 'A'	won	7 – 0
	Vs	Grey 'B'	won	4 – 3
	Vs	Lawson Brown	drew	3½ - 3½
	Vs	Pearson	lost	1½ - 5½
	Vs	St Dominics	won	6 – 1

The 'B' team took first position in the 'B' League despite the loss to Pearson.

The end of 2012 saw the departure of five stalwarts who had been playing chess since their Primary School days, and all of whom had represented EP in various age groups. They were Nathan Dennis, Lyndon Appel, Lee Baatjes, Jarred Boscombe and Kurt Japtha. Alexander Jasson and Kyle Dawson were also in the 'A' team in 2012. Representing EP at the 2012 National Championships in the various age groups were:

U/20 - N Dennis, L Baatjes and L Appel  
U/18 - A Jasson and G Taai  
U/16 - B Le Grange, S Hastie and J Fagbuyi (Reserve)

The Inter House Competition was won by Inggs, followed by Dugmore and Sutherland.  
The Shtein Trophy for the Senior Champion went to Alexander Jasson.

A period of rebuilding took place for both senior and junior chess players. In 2016 only one Primary team was entered in the league, winning seven, drawing one and losing one match. The seniors also had just one team in the league, ending with a 50-50 win-loss ratio. Led once again by **Lilitha Hempe**, the seniors were victorious in all their matches (albeit fewer than normal) in 2017. **Hempe** had the distinction of representing the **South African Federal Chess Team at the Commonwealth Games in India in 2017**. (See photo of Lilitha Hempe in chapter 43, page 234.)

The trend since 2017 had been to enter only one Muir chess team per senior/junior division, which was an indication that fewer boys had reached the requisite standard in order to compete against other schools in the leagues. On the other hand, provision was made for boys to learn and enjoy the game by joining up for Social Chess, which, happily, appeared to be growing in popularity by 2019. In that year, however, the one Primary Chess team which entered the league succeeded in winning all of the matches in their Pool, emerging a top 3 position in the finals. It would be only fair to conclude one's remarks about Primary Chess at Muir by acknowledging the many years of dedicated service given to this extra-mural activity by Mrs Serene Bayman, who retired officially at the end of 2014.