

# Black chess grandmaster visits Harlem

NEW YORK (AP) — Unleashing what appears to be a deadly attack on his opponent's king, 9-year-old Eliot Majors slides his queen diagonally across the chessboard—then inexplicably halts one square short.

Check. Not checkmate. Several watching youngsters groan. "Nooo!" cries one, falling to the ground in dramatic disbelief.

"You sure you want to do that?" asks Maurice Ashley, casually tucking his glasses into a jacket pocket as he takes a seat beside the boy.

As Arthur Ashe did for tennis, as Tiger Woods is doing for golf, 34-year-old Ashley — the world's first and only black grandmaster of chess — is helping bring an elite game played predominantly by whites to minority kids.

From New York to Los Angeles, covers of ChessLife magazine featuring Ashley are taped to the walls of inner-city recreation halls where youngsters gather to play the intricate centuries-old game.

"I have people calling from all over wanting him to come to their schools," says Barbara DeMaro, executive assistant of the United States Chess Federation. "Kids look up to him. There's a feeling, if he can do it, we can do it."

When he opened the Harlem Chess Center at the Police Athletic League community center in central Harlem seven months ago, Ashley thought kids would embrace the game, but the level of interest surprises him.

During the week, some 80 children who might have headed for basketball hoops after school instead pack a tiny room lined with white-and-green checkered boards. Using moves that reflect

medieval war strategy, they learn how to maneuver pawns, castles, bishops, knights and queens in a battle to capture the opposing kings.

"One of the most depressing things about growing up in the inner city — and I did — is that there's handball, basketball, football, all kinds of sports things, but very little in the way that is intellectually stimulating," says Ashley, who was barely a teen when he and his family moved from Jamaica to Brooklyn.

Ashley learned the rules of chess at age 9. He started getting serious at 14, latching onto teens and young men who spent hours playing fast and furiously in Brooklyn's Prospect Park.

After graduating from City College with an English degree, he started coaching and led a Harlem middle-school team — the Dark Knights of Mott Hall — to three national championships in six years.

Meanwhile, he was ascending the international chess rankings and last March was awarded the game's highest title — grandmaster. Only 500 others hold the rank around the world, including Garry Kasparov and Bobby Fischer.

September found him at the gala opening of the Harlem Chess Center, which like the Dark Knights is funded by the nonprofit Harlem Educational Activities Fund.

For the day, streets were blocked off and rows of chess boards lined sidewalks. Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis played and spoke with the kids.

"We had so many kids sign up that first day," Ashley says. "We were worried we weren't going to be able to take them

all." But they did and today a few chess enthusiasts who spend as much time calming down overeager students as they do coaching them run the Harlem Chess Center.

"I can't walk down the hall without having eight little kids come up to me asking can they please play chess today," says Brian Hawkins, 30, as he intervenes in an argument between two boys over a dubious chess move.

Thousands of elementary, middle and high school

students in Harlem and the South Bronx have already learned the game thanks to another nonprofit program — Chess-In-Schools.

Studies show that young chess players raise their reading scores and concentrate better. The game teaches strategy and consequences and instills confidence.

Last year, every eighth-grader in the Mott Hall chess program was accepted at either Stuyvesant High School or the Bronx High

School of Science, two of the top high schools in the nation.

"We had some rough kids in that class, and I honestly believe chess made the difference," says Jerald Times, the Dark Knights' current director.

At all the chess programs around the city, teachers place special emphasis on the girls, who tend to quit around the sixth grade. Until then, they do just as well, often better, than the boys.

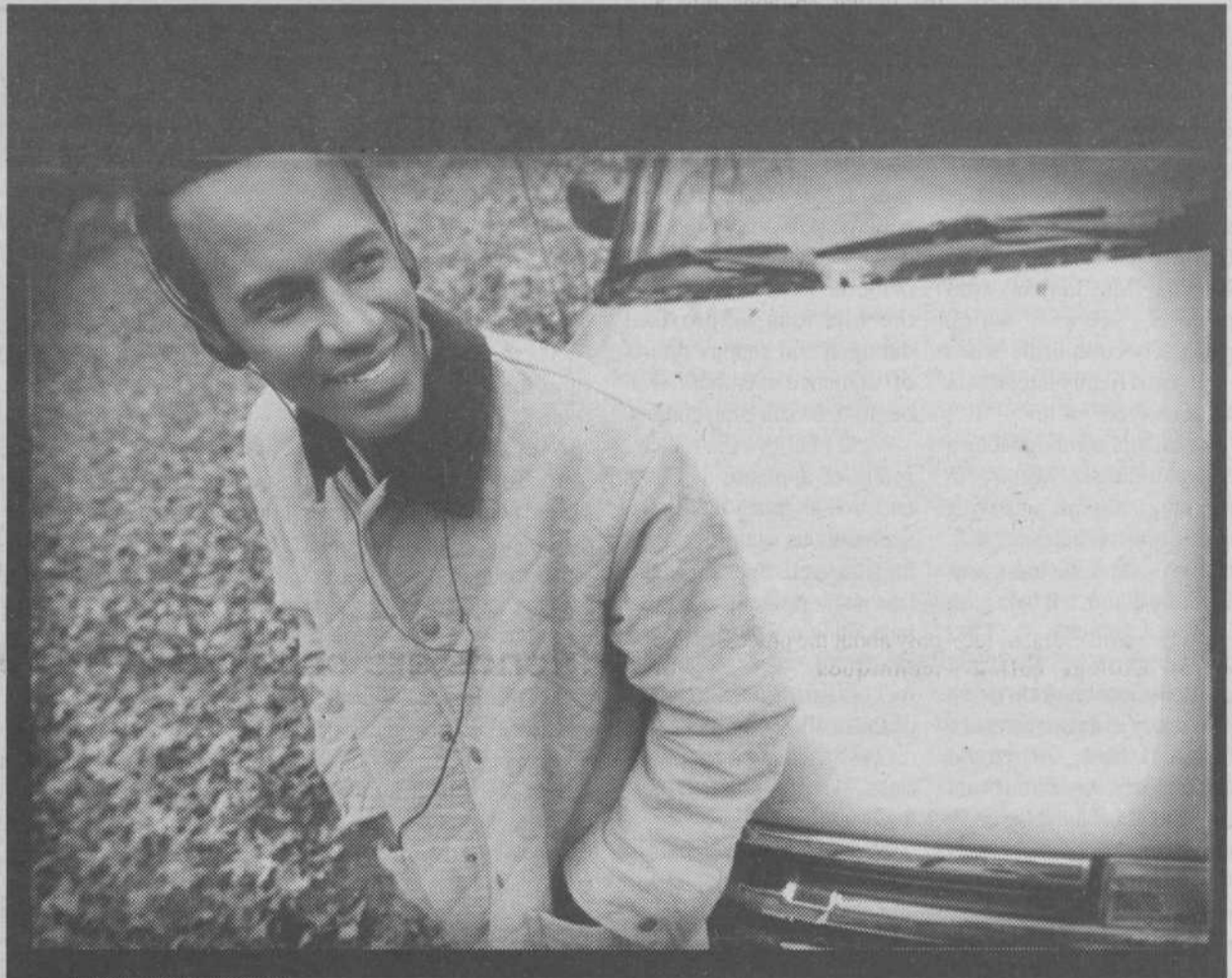
At the chess center, Esme Rogers' eyes sparkle as she

beats New York University volunteers, even after giving them a three-minute handicap in speed chess.

Watching two instructors wrestle with a complex chess problem, the 9-year-old cannot stay away; her fingers literally twitch with desire to move the pieces.

Unable to figure out the problem by the time her father comes for her, she writes down the pieces' places so she can keep trying at home.

"I like this one," she says. "It makes you think."



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## Black newspaper publisher to have school named in his honor

St. Louis, AZ (NNPA) — Cloves C. Campbell Sr. may be the first African-American newspaper publisher to have a school named in his honor, the NNPA has learned. Campbell, who is accustomed to firsts, has been honored in the naming of a new state-of-the-art school for children (grades K through 8) located in South Phoenix, AZ.

Campbell was Arizona's first African-American named to the state senate. In that capacity, he was one of the state's pioneers in legislation on bi-lingual education, the Martin Luther King Holiday and to initiate a commission on the status of women.

Campbell, who became publisher of the Arizona Informant in 1971, has lived his entire life in the same black community where the school has been established. The area school board voted unanimously to have the school named for him. "I don't believe in rocking the boat," said the veteran publisher who currently serves on the board of directors for the Carver High School Afro-American Museum. "I believe in turning the damned thing over to see who can swim."

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