

## Reflections by Dr Lyndon Bouah – Elsie's River Chess Club

On Thursday 15 December 2016 I paid a visit to the Elsie's River Chess Club in Halt Road, Elsie's River. The club had earlier in the month invited me to their clubs prize giving and I accepted the invitation. I was accompanied to the awards evening by Mr Micheal James who is a top player in WP and at University level and who was in Elsie's River. After I parked my car I was astonished to find a mural on the wall of Winnie the Pooh inviting members of the public to join the chess club.



*Mr Micheal James*

The Master of Ceremonies was Mr. Eugene Steenkamp, a Chess Western Province executive member. He stated that the idea of the award evening was borne out of

the commitment the executive of the club had to empower the youth of Elsie's River so that the area is not only known for gangsterism and drugs but must also be known as an area that produces good chess players. Elsie's River Chess club has been promoted from the D to the C Division and also from the C to the B Division. They will now in the 2017 WP League campaign to try to be promoted to the Premier league of WP.

In my speech I informed the audience that I had a number of linkages with the club. My chess Club Steinitz Chess Club played its first competitive league match ever in 1979 against Elsie's River chess club. The board one of Steinitz for that match was none other than the well-known chess coach Roland Willenberg who played against a school teacher Winston Petersen. Petersen was also a strong tennis player and was one of South Africa's top tennis players in his day. In that same match the late Mr. Colin Clarke played on behalf of Elsie's River. Mr Clarke would later become the Secretary General of the South African Council on Sport (SACOS) who was for many years the sports movement's organisation against apartheid. So Elsie's River can be proud of the fact that one of their former members was a supreme administrator who was at the forefront in the fight against apartheid.

In 1991 I entered the University of the Western Cape as a seventeen year old who wanted to change the world. South Africa was going through difficult times as the talks to end apartheid appeared to be struggling. In the chess world Dr. Berte Van Wyk embarked upon chess development. He drafted a number of students from UWC which included myself to help him form and revive chess clubs. So from about May 1991 every Wednesday afternoon I found myself in Halt Road, Elsie's River where we revived the Elsie's River Chess Club. The librarian there Mr. Bernard Fortuin who was himself a capable chess player welcomed this intervention and I remember fondly spending many hours there. The club was again active.

In 1989 the South African Tertiary Institutions Sport Congress (Satisco) held a chess championship at Songhe College in Worcester. This event was won by a UWC student Mr. David Hartzenberg who was from Elsie's River and who still plays for them.

In the years just following the turn of the millennium the club received a human resource boost when Mr. Hendrik Marcus and Mr Eugene Steenkamp joined the chess club. They brought with them energy and passion and this translated into Elsie's River becoming a strong brand in the area and in WP. I was so glad that Mr. Marcus was making a difference because he was one of my first opponents in the 1987 Chess Association for the People of South Africa (Capsa) event held in East London. He was from King Williams Town and was now living in Elsie's River.

A few years Mrs. Ida Serfontein invited me to her home in Somerset West as she wanted to clear her garage of some old chess magazines. I gladly took the old green copies of the South African Chess players off her hands. There were literally hundreds of copies of these green books that were published over the years.

I often spent weekend morning poring over these old books. I then made a startling discovery. One of the strongest players in the early 1970s was an attorney from Elsie's River called Gerald Holmes. Mr Holmes was later to become Judge Holmes at the Cape High Court. Justice Holmes played a strong game of chess and his rating was at master level. He won a number of events in Cape Town and Natal and one infamous event stood out. He won an event and because the prize giving took place in a hall reserved for white people he could not receive the trophy in front of the players that he had vanquished. Quite incidentally I later found out that both his daughter and son attended law classes with me at the University of the Western Cape. His daughter informed me that her late father never quite recovered from that incident. That incident however was one of the catalysts that led Mr. Andre Van Reenen to form the non-racial Western Province Chess Association and the South African Chess Association (SACA) which later became the Chess Association for the People of South Africa (Capsa). Elsie's River can take pride in the achievements of Justice Holmes.

Elsie's River has produced many fine players which include the Rossouw brothers but the strongest player to date in the modern era is Michael James who has won numerous events at club level, at WP and at national and international level. Michael James obtained his Junior Protea Colours and has gone on to represent WP

and South Africa at many events. Elsie's River can be proud of the fact that this was his home club where everything started.

I spent a stint coaching the club under the WP Club Development programme in 2005/6. I spent a six week stint every week coming to Elsie's River library to strengthen and educate the club. It was gratifying to see that the club gave recognition to Mr. Julian Schroeder the local librarian who was made an honorary member of Elsie's River.

I too received a medal and was bestowed as a honorary member of Elsie's River chess club. It is an honour I shall cherish as I watch the club make its mark on WP and South African chess.



*Elsie's River Chess Club*

Regards

Dr Lyndon Bouch