

Reflections by Dr Lyndon Bouah - Cape Town Heritage Chess Festival Welcome Dinner

Cape Town Chess Club is celebrating its 132nd year of existence. I was the key note speaker at the welcome dinner on Wednesday 22 March 2017. Here is my speech.



The President of Chess South Africa, Mr. Eldo Smart and members of his executive, the former president of Chess South Africa, Mr. Andre Van Reenen, the South African women's chess champion Women International Master Dr Denise Frick, The President of Chess Western Cape Mr. Mark Lewis and members of his executive, the President of Cape Town Chess Club International Master David Gluckman and his executive and members of Cape Town chess club, the President of Chess Western Province, Dr Deon Solomons, fellow Olympians gathered here today, ladies and gentleman, on behalf of the Western Cape Provincial Government and in particular the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport, I welcome you here to celebrate the 132nd anniversary of the founding of Cape Town Chess Club.



1992 SA Olympiad team!!!



Dr Lyndon Bouah making the keynote speech at the Cape Town Chess Club Heritage Dinner. The club has turned 132 this year on 19 March 2017.



Mr. Eldo Smart president of Chessa making a speech at the Cape Town Chess Club Heritage Dinner on the 132nd birthday!



All the Protea players in the house!!do you know the year?



Dr Solomons, Prof Leslie London, Dr Denise Frick , Dr. Omar Esau, Dr Lyndon Bouah and Dr Shabier Bhawoodien at the Cape Town Chess Club Heritage Dinner March 2017

When IM David Gluckman approached me with the idea of hosting this festival to celebrate the longevity of Cape Town chess club I did not hesitate for a single moment. My department consists of many units and one of those is the Heritage unit. I have come to value and appreciate heritage because it teaches us about our history and who we are. Heritage is defined as something that is of long standing and is passed down from generation to generation. Cape Town chess club at its young age of 132 is an example of the heritage of chess in Cape Town, the Western Cape, South Africa and Africa.

Mr. Leonard Reitstein states on page ten of his interesting book, a History of Chess in South Africa (2003), that Cape Town chess club is the oldest chess club in the country, boasting an uninterrupted existence since its foundation on 19 March 1885. It is recorded that Melbourne chess club is the oldest in the Southern Hemisphere having been formed in 1866 with Cape Town Chess Club being the second oldest.

Cape Town chess club was a dynamic club. It had members of high rank in its membership and was always situated around the centre of Cape Town. Reitstein records that in the June 1941 edition of the Cape Times, a Mr Charles Murray, recalled that the Cape Town Chess Club was situated at the

top of Adderley street and that Mr. WP Schreiner, the then Prime Minister of the Cape Colony often used to drop in for a few minutes to watch play with interest (2003:13).

The Cape Town Chess Club was an ambitious chess club and soon set itself the task of organising the first South African Open Championship. The first one was held in 1892 and was held in Burg Street at the Metropolitan Hall. I drive past this building every day on my way to work and the store Food Lovers Market is now situated there. The event started on 16 April 1892. The event organised by Cape Town was of course a spectacular one. The tournament was opened by the Bishop of Cape Town and Reitstein recorded that others on the platform included General Cameron, the officer commanding the local British forces and the Surveyor General Leo Marquard. A letter from his Excellency the Governor was read. Prize money amounted to £ 80 with first prize being £25. The club also organised the second SA Open in 1897.

In 1907 Cape Town Chess Club was responsible for initiating the union of clubs to be known as Western Province. The other clubs were Woodstock Chess Club, YMCA and Tokai. They met and formed the union with Mr. H M Boddy as the first President. The first league was also held that same year which was won by Cape Town. Cape Town chess club then became the first ever Western Province champions. In 1908 and 1909 the club retained its championship title but in 1910 YMCA won with Cape Town second. I noted in my research that in the first year of the league that there were five players and as the league progressed they moved to 8 players. It seems the modern day WP league may yet learn from our predecessors. It is thus interesting to reflect that the WP Union and League is this year 110 years old! The league was however not consistently held but well done Cape Town chess club for having won those first three editions of the WP League. I have noticed that a chess club called the Civil Service also entered and I may have to consider regathering those forces!

Mr. Lew Leppan in his fascinating book the South African Book of Records (1999) notes that the first Living Pieces game took place between Rondebosch and Cape Town chess club on the Grand Parade in 1888.

In 1985 Cape Town chess club celebrated its centenary year and invited speakers such as Mr. Simmy Lewis, Mr. Nick Barnett and Mr Leonard Reitstein. A similar chess festival was held such as the present one and the South African Chess player (May 1985: 39) records that a certain Charles De Villiers beat a young David Gluckman in the speed Handicap tournament and won the princely sum of R60. A gala evening was held at the end of the festival at which prizes were presented by then president of the SA chess federation Mr. Eddie Price. Mr. Dieter Morschel played the wind quintet at the event. I have noticed that Charles is yet again competing just as he did 32 years ago. I may have to request my colleagues to also declare Charles a living chess heritage!

In 1991 Cape Town chess club led the progressive elements of the establishment SA chess federation when in August 1991 it agreed to play a match against a combined Bellville South- UWC chess team in Bellville South. That match was the forerunner of unity in South Africa. The dynamism of Cape Town chess club when it organised the first SA Open in 1892 was thus complemented 100 years later when it contributed to the discussions to form a unified WP chess body in 1992. Cape Town chess club went on to win the WP League a number of times thus building on their initial triple success in those early years of the 20th century.

We, of course, cannot end the evening without mentioning the late chairperson of Cape Town chess club, Mr. Élan Rabinowitz. He was for many years the face of Cape Town chess club. With his calm demeanour and attention to detail he was able to provide invaluable counsel at all the WP Council meetings. He would invariably arrive with his black briefcase and take a seat towards the back of the hall. He contributed fiercely and in 1997 when Chess Western Province was going through some dark times he led the discussions to ensure that the gains of unity were protected and that we could prosper as a union. To Élan your memory and hard work will forever be remembered at Cape Town Chess Club and by Chess Western Province.



I wish all the participants well in their various events this week. I have noted that the youthful Mark Lewis clinched the seniors section of Heritage Festival. Congrats to Mr. Lewis Who was also awarded the Lifetime achiever award earlier this month. I have seen many Olympian players competing in the various events this week and all having a good time. Cape Town Chess Club we salute you and on behalf of the Western Cape Provincial Government we thank you for contributing to the heritage of chess and sport in the Western Cape and South Africa and to our vision as the Department of Cultural Affairs of being a socially inclusive, creative, active and connected Western Cape. I thank you.

Regards

Dr Lyndon Bouah

Chief Director: Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport

22 March 2017