

EDUCATION



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TEAM MEMBERS — Members of the Mt. Vernon Township High School Chess Team include, from left, **FRONT ROW**, Herbert Fox, Jeffrey Wright, Dakota Foltz and Brandon WilliamsMeeks. **BACK ROW**: Darrell Haynes, Tyler Beard and Coach Bill England.

MVTHS Chess Team hosts first home match

BY DAVID BELCHER

MT. VERNON LIFESTYLES EDITOR

MT. VERNON — It was much more than just another chess match in December when Mt. Vernon hosted Eldorado.

It was the first home match in Mt. Vernon Township High School chess history. The Rams were not gracious hosts by blowing the Eagles out of the water by winning six of seven boards.

MVTHS chess coach Bill England, who has coached the team throughout its four season history, said he would like to eventually see a chess league grow among Southern Illinois high schools. "This is the first step," he said of the Eldorado meet.

The school has had to play the bulk of its matches in the St. Louis area due to lack of Southern Illinois high school chess squads.

At last year's Illinois high school state chess tournament in Peoria, Mt. Vernon was the only school south of Charleston, which was dominated by Chicago-area schools, according to the Illinois High School Association Web site.

In December, the chess Rams opened the season by capturing sixth place in a 22-team Gateway Board Tournament at Chaminade College Preparatory School in



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FIRST HOME MEET — Herbert Fox, IN THE PHOTO AT LEFT, competes for Mt. Vernon in the first home chess meet in school history. Dakota Foltz, IN THE PHOTO AT RIGHT, helps Mt. Vernon top Eldorado in the game.

St. Louis.

Tyler Beard and Jeffrey Wright each won a medal for winning three of four games.

Also at St. Louis, Brandon WilliamsMeeks placed 16th out of 26 on Board 1, Darrell Haynes placed 12th out of 22 on Board 2 and Herbert Fox placed 16th out of 24 in his first meet on Board 4. Tyler Hall, also won one of his four games.

"Practice and concentration," were cited by England as critical to chess success.

As with any competition, confidence is also important. "I tell my kids anybody

can be beat," he said. "I want them going into every game believing they can win."

This also marks the first year chess has been a school-sponsored extracurricular activity. The club had been self-funded by England, parents of team members, team members and social organizations.

Team members practices from 3:30 to 5 p.m. each Wednesday in England's classroom. Team membership is open to any MVTHS student. The only requirement is wanting to play chess. England said skill and experience levels range from those just learning the game to those who have played for years. Chess is dismissed by some as too difficult of a game to even try. England said while it is not difficult to learn the moves, "It will take a lifetime to master the strategy." "It is very much a thinking game," he said. "There is a lot of thought involved. You have to be able to adjust to different situations. But, those skills are rolled over into life. In chess you have to learn to accept defeat and disappointments." England said a rookie chess player will likely suffer repeated defeats before winning a match. "I've had kids play 100 games and lose all of them. But, I tell them, 'Don't



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DEEP CONCENTRATION — Brandon WilliamsMeeks concentrates on his game while competing for the chess Rams.

give up.' Then, there is that glow of pride when they finally win."

The schedule for the remainder of the season includes:

- Saturday — Gateway Team Tournament at Lindbergh High School, St. Louis;
- Jan. 21 — at Eldorado High School;
- Jan. 30 — Gateway Class Tournament at Lindbergh High School, St. Louis;
- Feb. 6 — Gateway Action Tournament at Westminster Christian Academy, St. Louis;
- Feb. 11 to 13 — State Meet, Peoria.

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