TIMES PAST: SOME REMEMBRANCES AND REFLECTIONS

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In the June 1997 issue of the *ICCA Journal*, Professor I.S. Herschberg laid out, with his customary flair and insight, this publications 20-year history, sliced delicately, like a serving of saumon fumé, into TIMES PAST, TIMES PRESENT, and TIMES FUTURE. Since I was one of the primary guardians of the Journal PAST, it was only natural that I be asked to contribute to this 20th anniversary issue. But, that courtesy notwithstanding, there may be a few constructive thoughts that an ICCA gray-beard (now literally so) can add to Bob's thesis that TIMES FUTURE must embrace with vigor, but with appropriate caution, the publication of an online Journal using interactive technology for such indispensable tasks as peer review, editing, and wide dissemination. But, more about that later; first some history.

The Newsletter

The *ICCA Newsletter* was born at Northwestern University in May of 1978 after the formation of the International Computer Chess Association in Toronto in 1977, where CHESS 4.7 (David Slate, Larry Atkin and Keith Gorlen) won the second World Computer Chess Championship. As the first President of the ICCA, I agreed to edit a Newsletter, the founding of which had been encouraged by Mr. Barend Swets of Delft, and others.

As a fledgling publication, the Newsletter reported on ICCA and ACM-sponsored competitions, reviewed publications and new developments, communicated ICCA business and policy topics, and occasionally published a tutorial or research note. But, by the age of six, it was clearly time for a change. First a change of name. Like our son Robert, who went from Bobby to Bob around age six, the *ICCA Newsletter* was to become the *ICCA Journal*. But, of much greater significance was sending the young paper off to a new school. And to what better place than that hotbed of European computer-chess activities, the Netherlands.

The first issue of the Journal appeared in August 1983, with Dr. H.J. (Jaap) van den Herik as Editor and Professors Herschberg and Tony Marsland on the Editorial Board. The Newletter's new school was the Delft University of Technology, and the company it kept was heady indeed. The first issue was graced by an article entitled *The Game of Chess: Its past, present and future* by Mikhail Moiseyevich Botvinnik. The old Editor looked on with pride as the young Journal grew in size, gloss, and stature, due in large measure to the intelligence and hard work of the Jaap and Bob team. And now, fully mature in its 20th year, the Journal has published the amazing story of the defeat of Garry Kasparov by DEEP BLUE. Quite an odyssey for the field and for the publication that chronicled this fascinating trip.

Throughout these years, the Journal has consistently published high-quality research and development reports, written by a distinguished collection of international contributors to our field, and by their not infrequent critics and supporters. Bob Herschberg's June 1997 article described in wonderful detail the time-consuming and often frustrating process of producing these quarterly periodicals. I particularly enjoyed his recounting of the difficulties in trying to pan nuggets of pure and lively English prose from the often linguistically contaminated ore of English-language-challenged manuscripts (to use the politically correct terminology).

Challenges

The editing of the initial issues of the *ICCA Newsletter* had a different set of challenges to contend with. I would have been delighted just to have had manuscripts to edit! As seen from the facsimile of the first page of Vol. 1, No. 1 of the *ICCA Newsletter* which appears below, we invited contributions from readers, and hoped that some would appear. And they did. But, more often than not, the articles dealt with the growing number of world-wide computer-chess competitions, a wonderful phenomenon for those of us who relished seeing the field expand and prosper. However, research reporting lagged frightfully behind new developments, due above all to the fact that potential authors were otherwise occupied producing robust chess-playing programs. The question then was, how could we encourage the writing of research-related notes and articles? Why not start at home?

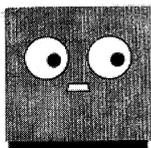[1] Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. Email: bbmittman@compuserve.com.

In an effort to encourage the Northwestern University team to publish some of their remarkable advances in chess programming, I asked Dave Slate to write something. After some weeks of waiting, it was clear that we were using the wrong approach. There must be a better way to pry some written material from such a very voluble, but reluctantly scribal, talent. What about just talking? So, we acquired a tape recorder and I played "interviewer". Those of you who know Dave will appreciate the bizarre scene of our secretary valiantly trying to transcribe recorded cassettes in which Slate's comments would come out in a melange of fabricated foreign accents from the steppes of Russia, to the barrios of Mexico City, to the bazaars of New Delhi. Despite the initial difficulties of extracting useful material from our development team, Northwestern University's contributions to the field of computer chess were eventually published and used successfully by later generations of chess programmers.
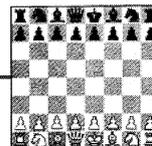
Vision and Fast Publication
But now to say something about TIMES FUTURE. Bob Herschberg strongly supports the use of the internet as the medium of choice for the next generation of the *ICCA Journal*. I cannot agree more. He laid out many of the advantages of moving to an internet-based publication, with emphasis on the editing side of the process. Consider as well some of the advantages that would be available to authors and readers alike. Not all of these innovations will work out as anticipated, but they are compelling enough to merit serious consideration. The advantage of a growing online archive of computer-chess related publications is self evident. It is possible also to reduce the delay from submission to publication, providing at the same time a potentially productive environment for interactive peer-review. The content of the Journal will also evolve, giving access through hypertext links to such features as simulations, graphics, animation of game analyses, and display of algorithms or bits of code.

Of course, there will be such initial problems as the of lack of security for transmitted manuscripts, the financial support needed to pay the Journals editing expenses, the proper methods for providing official ICCA "certification" of publication, the desire of some members to continue receiving a paper copy of the Journal, and others. But, these are issues not unique to the ICCA, and are being addressed by other organizations struggling with comparable problems.

So, from the perspective of someone who was present at the birth of the ICCA and of its publications, I urge the present Administrative and Editorial Boards to set in motion the necessary studies and activities to bring Bob Herschberg's vision to fruition.

INTERNATIONAL COMPUTER CHESS ASSOCIATION
(I.C.C.A.)

ICCA Newsletter

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FIRST ISSUE EDITORIAL

This is the first issue of a news-
letter which will report on activi-
ties in computer chess. It is
intended to publish news of compe-
titions, publications, new develop-
ments, and personalities in the
field of computer chess, as well as
contribution from our readers.

The participants at the 2nd World
Computer Chess Championship in
Toronto last year felt that an or-
ganization was necessary to enhance
communication among practitioners
in the field. We, at Northwestern,
volunteered to inaugurate ICCA and
to undertake an initial mailing.
However, it will be necessary to
charge a membership fee if we are
to continue providing this clearing-
house function. The organizers
have decided on an annual fee of
$5.00 to support the printing and

Finally, I want to thank Mr. Barend
Swets of The Netherlands for his
efforts in getting us off to an
excellent beginning. Barend organ-
ized the initial meeting in Toronto
and designed and produced our attrac-
tive letterhead. We are fortunate
to have such an active and enthusi-
astic colleague representing ICCA in
Europe. This first issue is dedi-
cated to him.

                              B. Mittman, Editor

THIS IS YOUR NEWSLETTER

In order to provide timely, informa-
tive and interesting material on
computer chess, we need your help.
Please send in any information or
ideas pertaining to your programs,
to competitions, to publications,
etc. We shall try not to overlap
with the Computer Chess Newsletter,