Chess Club Offers Students the Chance to Rekindle Their Love of the Game

Has it been a long time since you played a really good game of chess? Would you like to learn how to play? Why wait? Just check out the Chess Club at USF St. Petersburg.

The Chess Club meets in the Davis Lobby every Wednesday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. where students are welcomed to practice their skills, challenge each other to a good game or learn how to play for the first time.

"Anybody who always wanted to play, I can teach you in 15 minutes," Robert S. Forman III, junior, economics major, said. "As a club, it's set up so that you can just stop by and play a game or two. You don't need any experience."

Forman, who has been involved with chess "for quite some time," has a special talent: He is able to play against 20 people at the same time.

On Wednesday, February 18th, Forman will showcase his abilities in a simultaneous exhibition in the Davis Lobby between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m., and is looking for anyone who wants to challenge him. An Ipod prize will be given to the winner, while those who plan to enter are asked to donate whatever money they can to support the group.

"The more people that come, even if they're not strong, the better chance they'll have," Forman said, describing how the more opponents he has, the more his attention is spread out between them.

Forman talked about how he has also played chess while blindfolded.

"You have a vague sense of where everything is," Forman said. "Just remember the 64 squares and after you've played a long time, certain positions are very familiar."

Forman described how his love of chess sometimes joins him in the classroom, where he can see the positions of students' seats and imagine where he would move them on the chessboard.

"That's when I know I've been playing too much chess and I need a break," Forman said.

The Chess Club, started in the fall 2008 semester, has over 45 members, with new students joining every week.

"I used to play when I was younger and hadn't for a long time," Abby Bennett, senior, environmental science and policy major, said. "I wanted to play and I waited for a group to play with."

"My sister taught me how to play when I was very young," Jonathan Gershuny, junior, accounting and finance major, said, describing how he had heard about the group and wanted to get involved.

Other members were either taught by their parents at a young age or just recently got into playing chess once they stopped by to play.

"Our goal is to inspire people to bring chess back into their lives; to rekindle their love of chess," Frank Biafara, the Dean of Arts and Sciences at USFSP and faculty advisor of the group, said. "We're looking for students who used to play in middle and high school and then just stopped playing."

Biafara explained how he had received an article from another chess lover about a growing trend of students who are involved with chess teams throughout middle school and high school, but for one reason or another stop playing once they get to college.

Around this same time, Bennett expressed her interest in creating a group so she and others, including Forman, could hone their skills and invite other students to learn the game. With a small group of interested students and 15 chess sets, the Chess Club at USFSP was born.

Shortly afterward, Biafora said, Andrew Sherman, the President of the Florida Chess Association and St. Petersburg Chess Club, came for a visit to give members free master chess lessons.

The group is currently in the process of preparing for their first chess tournament, which Forman said should be taking place within a month. They plan to take four members with them to compete at the St. Petersburg Chess Club, the longest continuously running chess club in America. Anyone is welcome to try to enter in the tournament.

"We're trying to win and be successful, but also to offer people a chance," Forman said. "It's not just for the best players. It's for everyone who wants to play."