

Anarchy at Junior World Championships in France

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Belfort France

As many have been following on the forums, two young bay area standouts, Daniel Naroditsky and Nicolas Yap, have been participating in the Junior World Championship in Belfort France.

Daniel finished tied for #5 in the world in the age under 10 with 8 out of 11 points. Nicolas finished #55 in the world in the under age 16 section. These were impressive results given the deplorable tournament conditions they had to tolerate. Bay area kids have it made with perfect weather, huge tournaments in conventino center type climate controlled venues, perfect food and above all perfect tournament organizers :). Imagine what these two bay area kids endured as you read the following reports.

From the beginning of the tournament, Daniel's father Vladimir has reported on horrible tournament conditions. And in the forums Nicholas Yaps mother Cheryl wrote the following report:

I'm Nicolas Yap's mother and I am not vocal about anything concerning chess as that's not my forte. But I have to echo Vladimir's comments regarding the WYCC because I, too, was affected personally. It was totally disgusting the way the Belfort chess federation treated the participants and their family members.

First of all, the Belfort chess federation demanded that we all prepay our hotel, transportation, meals, badges, and registration fees within about a month of accepting the invitation. Therefore, we had to come up with this huge sum of money in time for the USCF reps. to wire transfer the funds to the Belfort chess federation's bank account. And as has been reported the food was inedible and the transportation was nonexistent many times leaving many people stranded even late at night since games sometimes did not finish early. We got stranded twice and had to make arrangements for taxi service which was 'fun' considering we don't know fluent French and the Belfortians do not all know much English. What generally happened was that we paid additional money for food as no one could stand to eat what passed for food in the tournament dining hall. So we ended up eating in the local restos. which were not cheap. And as Vladimir reported, many days we took the public bus which isn't cheap either at 1.05 euro per person. So the transportation costs were duplicated too.

However, we who stayed at Hotel Boreal, a 3* hotel, were considered quite fortunate as others were bussed to Mulhouse and Besancon which are very far from Belfort. Pity those who got stranded by the shuttles and had to pay taxi fare of 60 euro one way! We understand this happened to one Canadian family who got sent to stay in Mulhouse.

As for the tournament it was a joke. No one from the Belfort chess federation was on hand at any time to direct anything. It was massive chaos upon arrival at the skating rink with everyone and their suitcases strewn about the grounds. And their chess reps. had no clue as to what they were doing. Not only that but they did not know English well enough to communicate. The badges that we paid for didn't exist and were not available until July 23rd! Btw, the opening ceremony was messy and unorganized as everything else. The opening day games started 3 hours late due to wrong data.

The playing venue was converted from the ice skating rink. The players were packed in like sardines and there was no ventilation save for a weak fan that did no good. They opened the entrance doors and a couple of back doors, but again the air was non-existent. A child did faint as Vladimir reported. Also Nic said that he could not concentrate in the tournament venue for the last three days of the tournament. No wonder: the air was hot and thick as Belfort's temperatures reached the 90F's including high humidity and being so many kids in one small space the air became hotter. They did open the sunroof but Nic said the sun came in stronger that way hitting the players full force. Many kids were either fanning themselves or just walking around to get some air. Also the hotel where we stayed the front desk (as is common in Europe at many hotels) turned off the a/c during the night or put it on very very low so the air was humid and hot in the room making it impossible for Nic to sleep.

On the final day my husband was verbally assaulted by two thug like guys who obviously worked for Sylver Tours, the so-called travel agency all delegations were forced to deal with. All my husband called for was to verify that a shuttle was indeed going to pick them up to take them to the Basel airport one hour's drive from Belfort. Judging from their stranding people he had all right to call because if they had missed their Basel flight to Paris it would have been really difficult to get on another SFO flight from Paris. But one guy yelled at him and actually ended by saying 'I'm sick of you chess people!' To that my husband yelled back that he was sick of them. Btw, from the get go Sylver Tours never released any information

unless they felt like it. Simple things such as the names of the hotels and their locations.

Unfortunately Nic had to experience his first international tournament in this manner. Belfort is not the place for a world tournament of any kind as there is no proper place to hold a huge tournament, the hotels are less than limited, and the attitudes of the chess people very rude. I have said many times to my husband that a major city such as Paris, Lyon, or even Basel would have been a better location for this type of world-class tournament. How Belfort was selected remains a mystery to us. One sure thing is that we felt totally taken advantage of by the Belfort chess federation.

I am hoping that the USCF will at least file a complaint to FIDE. Whether or not anything comes of it is uncertain, but at least the complaint would be made public. We heard that the Italian chess federation was either planning to sue or has already sued the Belfort chess federation. I hope this is true.

Certainly what happened in Belfort should never have been allowed to have happened. I dearly hope that this nightmare does not repeat itself.

Sincerely,

Cheryl

The following open letter was written by Aviv Friedman...a coach on the US Team. This will give you an idea on how badly a children's chess tournament can be run.

Letter and pictures are courtesy of www.chessbase.com where you can find a complete report on the tournament.

Having recently returned from a coaching assignment at the World Youth championships in Belfort, I'd like to write about some of the outrageousness many have experienced.

The sign of things to come started months before the actual event. The arrogant organizers headed by the president of the organizing committee Jean Paul Touze decided to be as skimpy as possible on the details and logistics on their website which necessitated writing emails of inquiry – many of which went completely UNANSWERED and others got replies but with very little help or answers offered.

Some delegations travel through a few time zones (The US being one of them) and so arrive a day earlier than the others to combat jet lag. Traditionally, going back as far as I can remember, the organizers understood that and arranged for proper pick up (mind you, each person, player, visitor or coach pays 100 Euros for accreditation and travel that more than covers this!) but here of course the organizers refused. After some correspondence they promised to do so if all travel info is given to them well in time, which of course it was.

Naturally, on the 17th of July, most of our people, many of whom traveled for many long hours, were NOT picked up, despite the promises. Many had to pay well over 100 additional Euros for taxis from the Basel airport to Belfort.

Upon arrival to our hotel, located 2 Km from the playing venue, we quickly realized the difference between 'comfort' and 'standard' – the rooms were small, without air conditioning, or even a table and chairs to work with the kids, and the shower was the size of a coffin. Obviously, had we known of this we could have made other choices – even paid extra, but I suppose it was just too much for the organizers. I must add that the hotel owners and staff were quite embarrassed about this, and did all they could to help us in our needs. Their good will which unfortunately did not rub on the organizers, proved invaluable.

Amazingly, we quickly realized that we were the lucky ones! Some other delegations stayed as far as 50 (!!) Km from the site, some in far more ridiculous conditions than us: Dilapidated hotels and college dormitories with communal bathrooms in the hall that cost sky-high prices. ALL ROOM prices were considerably higher than if one was to book himself and when you consider the usual kick back from hotels to the organizers, this amounts to nothing more than robbery! 89 Euros a day for single, 70 (per person) in a double and 59 (pp) in a triple are incredible prices for what the delegations got. In Crete last year, with all delegations in one venue and 5 star conditions and organization, prices were lower than normal list prices and less than what all paid for the much lower level places in Belfort!

The playing venue was an ice rink alongside a tennis club where everyone was to eat lunch and dinner. The food was bad (some of our people got sick) and extremely not kid-friendly. Lines were often long, and the area was of course poorly ventilated, but the true jewel in the crown was the playing area itself. On nice days it was semi reasonable, but on the hot days it was nothing short of a Turkish bath. As the delegation sat and melted in the analysis area, the poor kids were playing in temperatures around 40 degrees Celsius (~104 F) with high humidity. No water was supplied, no sanitary conditions near the chemical bathrooms outside, and of course over crowdedness. One of our 9 year olds who did have some water, did not dare drink it for fear she'd have to use the bathroom where there were long lines... The worries of a 9 year-old at the World Champs!

On some days the shuttle busses did not arrive to pick us up for the round, and so we had to scramble with city busses and taxis, frantically trying to make it – quite 'fun' for a delegation of 31 players and over 70 people in all. On one especially stormy day we arrived soaking wet, late for the start of the round. It took some strong words of insistence to give our

players the time they lost on their clocks.

During all this, the organizers blamed anyone and anything under the sun except of course, themselves! It was always the Federations' fault, the delegations, the players, and the weather, anything but them. Worse yet, there wasn't much of any good will shown and the only recourse at time was (as we quickly learned!) to either yell and use strong words or simply threaten to pull all of the players out. That last one (which we applied) got the organizers to change the first round mess of pairings where titled and rated players were not paired right and some players even paired in the wrong section (!) "Oh, we'll just fix it tomorrow" was the initial answer – never mind if some poor kid loses a game to someone years older than him and has his event ruined. The motto of the championship was "Pas de probleme! Mais c'est impossible" (No problem! But it's impossible)

I can go on and on about how the organizers kept all of the heads of delegations (and arriving players) in a pouring rain till they finally allowed the on site registration to begin, but I am sure by the now the picture is more than clear. Conditions were terrible, the organization was below amateurish and their attitude was miserable, and they madly overcharged us all. Everyone I spoke to, players, coaches, parents, heads of delegations, all agreed it was the most poorly organized and run event they have ever attended. In all the many years of traveling to world events in one capacity or another, it certainly was the worst one. Shame on you Jean Paul Touze! Shame on all of the committee members and on whomever authorized this bid! You showed no respect for people, no respect for kids and no respect for chess and no competence. I can only hope you never have another chance at any official event.

Aviv Friedman
A coach for the US team
Teaneck, NJ USA



A massive playing hall with portapotties and no bathrooms!



Karpov does simul



Intense playing



Jie Wang..girls under 10 champion