



Michael Su concentrates on his next move while competing in the Canadian Youth Chess Championships held at the Hilton Hotel on Tuesday.

JASON KRYK/The Windsor Star

Young chess players in elite company

Tournament attracts Canada's best

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The Windsor Star

Future kings and queens of the Canadian chess world have turned Windsor into a battleground, with an eye on conquering the world.

Almost 170 bright young minds on Tuesday kicked off

the Canadian Youth Chess Championship — the first time the prestigious tournament has hit southern Ontario.

"These are essentially the best young players in Canada," said John Coleman, the event's chief organizer. "The talent is very high."

One of the players, Eric Hansen, with a chess rating of 2550, already ranks among Canada's top echelon. And he's still a junior.

The winners in Windsor go on to represent Canada at the World Youth Chess Championship in Haldiki, Greece, in various age categories. In Windsor, competitors — who

have 90 minutes per game to make all their moves in the round-robin tournament — are aged six to 18.

The tourney at the Hilton Hotel concludes Thursday, and includes live webcasts of the top games. Though a number of excursions are planned for the almost 500 visitors, you can find many at the "players club," where parents and competitors gather to chat, play chess with one another — or even tackle chess on computers.

But in the competition room, where voices are hushed and players hunch over checkered boards, concentration reigns

supreme.

"I like chess because I like thinking," said Stephen Passadore, 14, a Grade 8 St. Gabriel student, shortly after the first round. "In chess you have to use your brain a lot so it helps you think ahead for what's going to happen."

Passadore, a straight-A student who also enjoys video games and soccer, thinks chess helps students learn — which various studies also indicate.

"I learned when I was really little," Passadore said. "I was in Grade 2 when I joined the chess club and I was beating Grade 8s. So I just kept going with it."

Other local talent includes: Zhehai Zhang, 9, who tied for first at the Ontario Youth Chess Championship; Joshua Myers, 14, from Essex, who placed second in the province; and rising star Rohan Talukdar, 7.

Six-year-old Luke Pulfer, the youngest competitor at the meet, likes more than just the game. He likes the camaraderie.

"It's fun," he said. "You meet new people."

The pint-sized player from White Rock, B.C., who has already amassed some 15 trophies, also shows how serious a player must be to compete at

chess.

His mother, Julie Domovich, said her son plays every day, attends a chess club three times a week and already has a coach.

"We do a lot more with chess than we do with soccer, which is his other love," Domovich said. "We could play a chess tournament every weekend if we wanted."

Though she has four children, she appreciates that her son has gravitated to chess.

"It's amazing," she said. "Chess helps build self-esteem. And he's so into math and strategy because of chess."