



News Release

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TJSL Professor Hosts “Chess Match Challenge” *12 Students Simultaneously Proved No Match for Chess Expert*

San Diego -- “Just trying to stay alive” were the words uttered by law student Jonathon Connolly and those same words appeared to represent the general consensus of all 12 law student competitors after only 15 minutes of playing Thomas Jefferson School of Law Professor Dennis Saccuzzo’s “Chess Match Challenge” on Thursday, September 22.

For the second straight year, Professor Dennis Saccuzzo volunteered to simultaneously play chess against several TJSL law students – an invitation that recruited the dozen brave challengers from among TJSL’s nearly 1,100 student body. This year’s match was special to Professor Saccuzzo as it was held on the exact day commemorating the 50th anniversary of his very first “Chess Match Challenge.”

“Fifty years ago I played simultaneous chess for the first time,” Saccuzzo explained. “I challenged my entire junior high school (Marina Junior High in the Bay area) to play against me, and I got 14 takers. One guy got a draw. And, fortunately, I defeated everyone else.”

Professor Saccuzzo has since become a chess expert. He studied under famed Chess Master George Koltanowski, and has played as many as 20 opponents at once. Professor Saccuzzo is the director of the “Bar Secrets” bar preparation program at TJSL, and says this type of challenge “both develops the student’s ability to deeply focus and sustain attention.”

“These skills, he adds, “are not just critical for chess players, but also for law students and practicing lawyers alike.”

First-year student Preston Gardner admitted, “I haven’t played chess in years but I do love the game... even if I am the first man out! I’m thankful that I lasted as long as I did.” Those were Gardner’s final words just moments before Professor Saccuzzo beat him in exactly 1 hour and 5 minutes.

Thursday’s chess match drew continuous spectators from the TJSL community as well as media coverage from all across San Diego County, including the San Diego Union-Tribune, NBC 7/39,

ABC Channel 10, CBS Channel 8, CW6, KUSI and Univision. Third-year student Ryan Ciriaco served as announcer for the event and provided KUSI with a stellar interview.

“I told them that it wasn’t a matter of whether or not Professor Saccuzzo was going to win... it was only a matter of time,” quipped Ciriaco.

And Ciriaco’s prediction came true when Professor Saccuzzo took down the last player, second-year student Jonathon Connolly, in 1 hour and 59 minutes. Connolly said he was proud to be the “last man standing” and was happy to receive the grand challenger prize - six tickets to see the San Diego Padres play the Cubs at PETCO Park and a chess instruction book by Jesus del la Villa titled *Dismantling the Sicilian: A Complete Repertoire for White*.

As for Professor Saccuzzo, he’s already looking to the future and wants to make the “Chess Match Challenge” a semi-annual event at TJSJL. So, those 12 opponents may get another chance soon to topple TJSJL’s “Check Mate King.” They’d better keep practicing!

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