

James Hamblin

1973 Junior Champion

1972, 1976, 1990 Denver Open Champion



James Hamblin winning the 1973 Colorado Junior Championship. I don't recall him playing the White side of a Queen's Gambit, but it must have worked for him here.



Remembering James Hamblin

by Curtis Carlson

"The best advice for political actors is very often to simply stop trying to solve social problems, since interventions not based on precise understanding are likely to do more harm than good." - **Michael Huemer**

"There is not an idea that cannot be expressed in 200 words. But the writer must know precisely what he wants to say. If you have nothing to say and want badly to say it, then all the words in all the dictionaries will not suffice." - **Eric Hoffer**

"Tactics are the Servant of Strategy." - **Mikhail Botvinnik**

"Most human beings have an almost infinite capacity for taking things for granted." - **Aldous Huxley**

"Chess is ultimately escapism. Life is what really matters. And when you finally come to the realization that the possibilities of life are infinite and more fascinating than anything a game can throw up, then you become imbued with a sense of extraordinary power." - **Danny Gormally**

"60 days a year I play in tournaments. 5 days I rest, and 300 days I work on my game." - **Akiba Rubinstein**

Three issues of *American Chess Journal* are free at:
<http://www.chabris.com/pub/acj>.

ACJ was a good publication that unfortunately didn't survive.

I was stunned and saddened to hear my longtime friend James "Humble" Hamblin passed away on January 3 shortly after his 65th birthday. He was Colorado Junior Champion in 1973, Denver Champion three times and Colorado champion in 2003. We met in 1970 at a high school tournament and were good friends nearly half a century. We shared many adventures during the Fischer boom, playing in tournaments in Utah, Missouri, Wyoming, New Mexico, Arizona, South Dakota, Montana, Oklahoma, and even some in Colorado! We saw the 1971 Fischer-Larsen games and analyzed the 1972 Fischer-Spassky games while they were in progress. The adjourned position from game three was shown on his black and white tv, and we struggled to set it up from the grainy display. When Bobby won we cheered! 1972 was a great time to play chess.

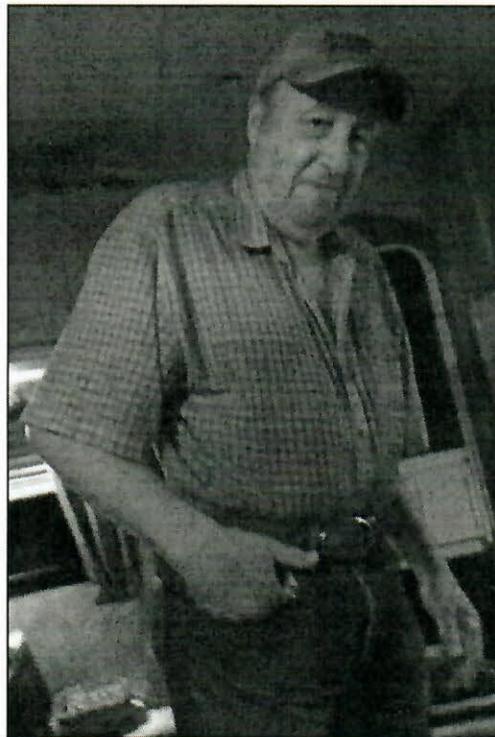
In 1970 "Humble" and I had a mini world championship 30-30 match. We tied at 12-12 and considered ourselves co-champions! In high school (before he drove) he often rode his bike from his Lakewood home to the Denver Chess Club, which was then at the downtown YMCA. He spent many hours playing all comers. He had a sharp sense of humor and said many funny things. Once while we were having lunch I gave my cat a small piece of hamburger, which it didn't eat. James said it wasn't a cannibal! He always made me laugh. We had a dozen tournament games from 1970-80; I won four and the rest were drawn. I survived several bad positions (see games below) so the

lopsided score is misleading. James just didn't play tough on his friends! I envied his tactical strength. He memorized many of Alexander Alekhine's brilliant attacking games; one of his favorites was:

<http://www.chessgames.com/perl/chessgame?gid=1012325>.

New Jersey master Marvin Sills lived in Denver from 1968-70 and thought James had the talent to be a grandmaster. Unfortunately "Humble" was inconsistent and lost too many games to lower rated players. He loved chess and never let a loss upset him.

In 1970 I persuaded James to try his hand at postal chess. He joined The Correspondence Chess League of America (CCLA) and did well in most of his games until dropping out after about a year. He disliked the slow pace of postal play. He would likely have won many tournaments had he persisted, but chess by mail isn't for everyone. "Humble" would probably have liked this Mikhail Tal quote: "I drink, I smoke, I gamble, I chase women, but correspondence chess is a vice I don't have!" Chess players are unique.



James Edmond Hamblin in 2018.

(Thanks to his brother Joe for providing this picture.)

James lived in Arizona for six months in early 1973, and played actively there. In June, Steve Dykstra, Mark Sherbring, Mike Dalesio and I drove to Phoenix for a tournament. He was pleasantly surprised to see us. He disliked working at a fiberglass warehouse, and after quitting said it was a dog's job! My mother (1925-2001) thought that was funny, and shortly before she died (more than 20 years after she last saw him) she asked if he still had a dog's job! I wasn't sure, but hoped not.



WAFIA wins the 1972 Denver Chess League!

Standing L-R: Mark Sherbring, James Hamblin, Robert Ascher, Tom Barber, Curt Carlson; **Kneeling L-R:** Mike Dalesio, Richard Wilds; **Sitting:** Steve Henderson.

Where are they now? Sherbring lives in Omaha, Ascher lives in Loveland, Carlson lives in Stockton, Dalesio lives in Arizona, Henderson lives in Southern California.

Whereabouts of Barber and Wilds are unknown.

James joined the Armed Forces in 1974. His mother proudly showed me his picture in Navy Uniform. Not surprisingly, he disliked the military's rigid discipline and was back in Colorado by 1976. For 40 more years he was a regular at CSCA events. His last tournament was the 2017 Wyoming Open; see <https://tinyurl.com/y2ra4ge8>. His final rating was only 2037, far below his true strength.

In the early 70's 2250 rated Robert Wendling was our region's strongest player. In five games from 1971-73 James had a very respectable 2-3 against him (when I had an embarrassing 0-6). James defeated 2300 rated Don Sutherland in the one game they played at the Denver Chess League. "Humble" was an excellent student who graduated near the top of his 1972 Lakewood High School class, which was also when I graduated from Wheat Ridge. I'll never forget the hundreds (if not thousands) of blitz games we played over the years. He won about two thirds. He liked tactical slugfests and defeated many strong players in complicated positions. He especially liked the King's Gambit, and with his beloved Alapin Sicilian defeated six time US champion Walter Browne at the 1983 National Open (see game below). He was lucky when Walter missed a good continuation, but a win is a win! Even Grandmasters make mistakes.

Like many chess players James never married and had no children. After moving to Stockton in 1983 I had little contact with him. We chatted briefly at the 1983 Pasadena US Open, where he said he'd let GM Andy Soltis off the hook. I last saw him in 1986 at the Colorado Open, and we last talked on the phone in 2001 shortly after Steve Dykstra died. I didn't know

then it would be the last time we ever spoke. RIP James Edmund Hamblin, who will be much missed by his family and many friends.



(Jim scaring off a burgler! June 27, 1972)

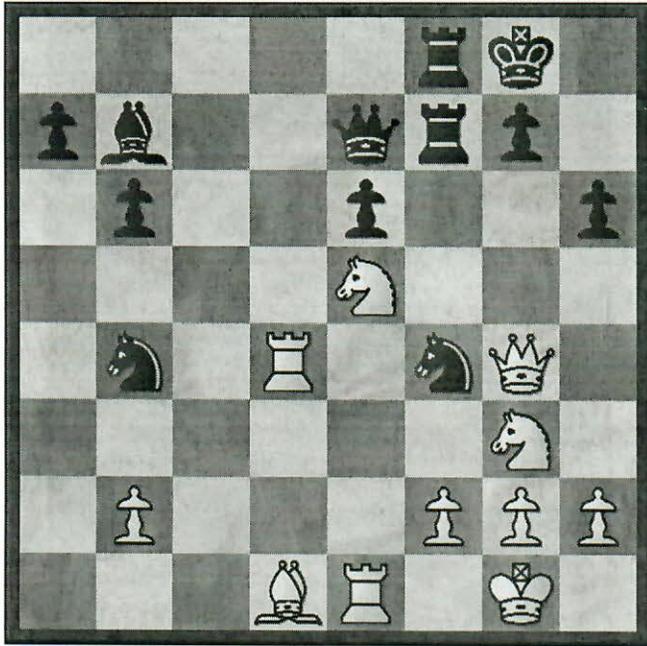
Here are some of his best games. As always, annotations are mine with help from Houdini Chess Engine (HCE), Komodo Chess Engine (KCE), and Chessbase. I am indebted to Joe Hamblin, Dean Brown, and Joe Eversole for providing information useful for this article. Two of James' best games were in my last article; see <https://tinyurl.com/y5gd4y64>, page 24. I didn't know then they should have been in this one.

1983 National Open James Hamblin (2100, age 29)

Six time US Champion GM Walter Browne (2600, age 34)

1.e4 c5 2.c3 (James won many games with his beloved Alapin.)
2...Nf6 3.e5 Nd5 4.d4 cxd4 5.cxd4 d6 6.Nf3 Nc6 7.Be2 e6 8.O-O Be7 9.Nbd2 dxe5 10.dxe5 O-O 11.Qa4 (White maneuvers his queen to the strong e4 square to support the e5 pawn. Also reasonable were 11.Re1 Qc7 12.Bd3 = HCE, and 11.Nc4 Qc7 12.a4 = KCE.) **11...Qc7 12.Qe4 b6 13.Rd1 Bb7 14.Nf1 Ncb4 15.Qg4 Qc2 16.Nd4 Qg6 17.Qh3** (17.Qxg6 hxg6 18.a3 Nc6 19.Nxc6 Bxc6 20.Bd2 Rac8 21.Ne3 = HCE.) **17...Bg5 18.Bxg5 Qxg5 19.Nf3 Qe7 20.Rd4 f5** (Of course not 19...Nc2? 20.Bd3 +-) **21.exf6?!** (Opening the f file for Black's rooks is dangerous. Better was 21.Rh4 Rad8 22.a3 {22.Rxh7? Nf4-+} 22...Nc6 23.Ne3 = HCE) **21...Rxf6 22.Qh4 h6?** (Right was 22...Nc2 -+, Walter must have disliked 23.Bd3, but White's attack runs out of steam after 23...Nxd4 24.Qxh7+ Kf7 25.Qh5+ g6 26.Qh7+ Ke8 27.Bxg6+ Kd7 28.Nxd4 Nf4 +- HCE.) **23.Rc1!? Nxa2?** (Walter liked to grab pawns, but 23...e5! was stronger, since after the rook moves Black gets a powerful knight on f4. Best was 23.Rad1!, since 23...e5 is met by 24.Rxd5 Bxd5 25.Rxd5 Nxd5 26.Bc4 = HCE.) **24.Re1 ==** (24.Rcd1 =

HCE, KCE.) **24...Nab4 25.Bd1** (25.Rg4 Raf8 26.N1d2 Rf4 += HCE.) **25...Raf8 += 26.Ng3 R6f7 27.Qg4?** (Best was 27.Qxe7 Rxe7 28.Bb3 += where it's hard for Black to exploit his extra pawn.) **27...Nf4 -/+ 28.Ne5**



28...h5? +- (Walter must have been in his usual time pressure. 28...Qc5! 29.Rd2 {29.Rxf4 Rxf4 30.Qxe6+ Kh7 31.Qg6+ Kh8 32.Bf3 R4f6 -+; 29.Nxf7 Qxd4 30.Nd6 Kh8 31.Nhf5 exf5 32.Nxf5 Qf6 -+ HCE, KCE.} 29...Nh3+! 30.Qxh3 Rxf2 -+ is crushing.) **29.Nxh5 Nxh5 30.Rd7! Nd5?** (Also hopeless was 30...Qf6 31.Nxf7 Rxf7 32.Rxf7 Qxf7 33.Qxh5.) **31.Rxe7 Rxe7 32.Qxh5 1-0** A fortunate win for James against a famous GM. Sometimes good players are unlucky! I suspect Walter was unhappy about this game!

This was one of the first games of Walter Browne's I saw: (<https://tinyurl.com/yxtzobt2>). He played 50...Nc4 instantly, and it made a deep impression on me and numerous other spectators. Hard to believe it was 45 years ago! Chess players accumulate many memories in their long lives.

James Hamblin (2200, age 31)
David Jellison (2250, age 31)
1985 Boulder Open

1.e4 e5 2.f4 (Humble loved gambits and sharp play!) **2...Qh4+!?** (Dave must have wanted to avoid main lines, but this move is dubious.) **3.g3 += Qe7 4.fxe5** (White acts before Black can play ... d5 but HCE prefers 4.Nc3 exf4 5.Bg2 +=) **4...d6 5.Nc3 dxe5 6.Nf3 = Bg4** (Perhaps too optimistic. Better is 6...Nf6 = HCE.) **7.h3 Bd7?** (As Magnus might say, too weak too slow! 7...Bxf3 8.Qxf3 Qf6 += HCE. Now Black is in trouble.) **8.Nd5 Qd6?** (From bad to worse! Dave was worried about losing his e-pawn, but best was 8...Qd8 9.Nxe5 Bd6 10.d4 ± HCE.) **9.d4 ± f6 10.c4! Be6?** (The only try to survive was 10...c5. Now the game is over.) **11.dxe5 fxe5 12.c5 Qxc5** (This is hopeless but 12...Qd8 13.b4! is also lost.) **13.Nxc7+ Ke7 14.Nxa8 Bxe4**

15.Bg5+ Kf7 16.Rc1 (16.Bc4+!) **16...Qa5+ 17.Bd2 1-0** 17...Bb4 18.Rc7+ Ne7 19.Bc4+ Ke8 20.O-O is a massacre. James adroitly crushes one of Colorado's top players.

James Hamblin (2200, age 35)
Randy Canney (2300, age 27)
1988 Boulder Open

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Nc3 c6 5.Bb3 d5 6.exd5 cxd5 7.d4 Bg4 = (HCE prefers 7...Bb4 +=, KCE also likes 7...Bd6 +=) **8.Nf3 Be7 9.Bxf4 O-O 10.Qd3 Nc6 11.O-O Rc8 12.Kh1 Re8?!** (This natural move leads to difficulties. HCE prefers 12...h6 {12...Be6 13.Ng5} 13.Bg3 Be6 =) **13.Be5 ± Nb4** (13...Nxe5? 14.dxe5 Nd7 15.Bxd5 is bad for Black. If 13...Be6 14.Ng5 White suddenly has a lot of threats.) **14.Qe3!?** (It seems wrong to put the queen on the same file as Black's rook, but James is after the king. HCE and KCE like 14.Qb5! threatening to weaken Black's kingside with 15.Bxf6) **14...Bh5 ±** (Another natural move which turns out badly. 14...Be6 = supports both d5 and f7.) **15.a3 Ng4?!** (Black is only slightly worse after 15...Nc6 16.Rae1. 16.Bxf6! Bxf6 gains a tempo on White's queen.) **16.Qf4! Nc6 17.Nxd5** (d5's defenders are gone! Also good was 17.Qf5 g6 18.Qf4 provoking a weakness.) **17...Na5?** (Better but still losing was 17...Ngxe5 18.dxe5 Bxf3 19.Rxf3 Kh8 +- KCE.) **18.Ba2** (18.Bc7! +- HCE.) **18...Rxc2?** (A blunder, but 18...Nc4 19.Nxe7+ Rxe7 20.Rae1 is also bad.) **19.Qf5 Rxc2** (19...Nf2+ 20.Rxf2 Bg6 21.Qxc2! Bxc2 22.Bc7 Qc8 23.Rxc2 +- HCE) **20.Kxg2 Qxd5 21.Qxg4** (21.Qxh5!) **1-0** When I see games like this I wonder how James ever lost to me.

"Humble" wasn't always successful with his Gambits.
 Here is one he almost wins, but doesn't.

James Hamblin (2200, age 26)
Richard "Buck" Buchanan (2000, age unknown)
Pueblo Open 1980

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 g5 4.Bc4 Bg7 5.O-O g4!? (Optimistic. 5...Nc6, 5...h6, and 5...d6 all give Black the advantage according to HCE.) **6.Ne1 = Bd4+!?** (More optimism! 6...d5 7.exd5 Ne7 = HCE.) **7.Kh1 ± d5 8.exd5 Qh4!?** (Even more optimism! 8...Ne7 9.Rxf4 Be5 10.Rf1 O-O was better but also difficult for Black.) **9.Rxf4 +-** (James had a way of getting won positions in nine moves with the King's Gambit!) **9...Bc5 10.d4 Bd6 11.Re4+** (When playing the King's Gambit one shouldn't worry about material! After 11.Nc3 Bf4 12.Bxf4 White's development advantage is overwhelming.) **11...Kd8 12.Bf4?!** (It's curious James missed 12.Nf3! Qh5 13.Ne5 +-) **12...Nf6 13.Re5 ± Bxe5 14.dxe5?** (This automatic recapture is wrong. Best was 14.g3! then 14...Ne4 {14...Qh5? 15.dxe5 +-} 15.gxh4 Nf2+ 16.Kg1 Nxd1 17.Bxe5 ± maintains the edge.) **14...Ne4 15.Qc1?! =** (15.g3 ± or 15.Be3 += were better.) **15...g3! 16.Nf3?! +=** (16.h3 Bxh3 17.Nf3 Qh5 18.Kg1 = HCE. It's safer for White to keep Black's g-pawn on the board) **16...Nf2+ 17.Kg1 gxh2+ 18.Nxh2? -+** (The only move was 18.Bxh2. With with no pawns around his king, White loses quickly.) **18...Rg8! 19.Kf1 Ng4! 20.Nxg4 Rxg4 21.Be3 Qh1+ 0-1** A nice finish by "Buck".

James Hamblin (1967, age 24)
Curtis Carlson (2200, age 24)
Denver Chess Club / June 3, 1978

1.e4 c5 2.c3 Nf6 3.e5 Nd5 4.d4 cxd4 5.Qxd4 e6 6.Bc4 Nc6 7.Qe4 d6 8.Nf3 (8.Bxd5 exd5 9.Qxd5 Be6 is good for Black) 8...dxe5 9.Nxe5 Qc7 10.Nxc6 bxc6 11.O-O (11.Nd2 Bd6 12.Nf3 O-O 13.O-O = Nunn-Kuligowski 1978. The text is OK but 11.Nd2 is probably better, to answer ...Bd6 with Nf3) 11...Bd6 12.f4!? (Typical of James' optimism. HCE prefers 12.Qh4 =) 12...Nf6?! (I don't recall why I made this retreat. Obvious and good was 12...O-O =+ HCE.) 13.Qe2 (13.Qf3 = HCE.) 13...O-O =+ 14.Be3 Rb8 15.Bd4? (Safer was 15.b3 Rd8 =+ HCE.) 15...Nd5 (It's still =+ after this, but Black can safely play 15...Bxf4. If 16.Bxf6 gxf6 17.Qg4+ Bg5 18.Rxf6 Qe5 -/+, or if 18.h4 h5 19.Qxh5 Be3+ 20.Kh1 Qe5-/+ HCE. I should have just left the knight on d5.) 16.g3 c5 17.Be5 Rb6? (This bad move loses the advantage. Right was 17...Bxe5 18.fxe5 Ne7 19.Na3 Bb7 when the inability to block the long diagonal with a pawn makes White regret 12.f4. The knight will soon occupy f5 and ideas of ...Qc6 gives Black a good game. Even in my youth {I'm 65 so 24 seems young!} I was reluctant to make exchanges, even when they were good.) 18.Na3 = a6? (This routine move leads to disadvantage. More consistent was 18...Qb7 19.Bxd6 Rxd6 20.Rad1 = HCE.) 19.Bd3 += f6? (Black seems determined to ruin his game. 19...Bxe5 20.fxe5 Rb8 += admits the mistake but was best.) 20.Bxd6 ("Humble" gets a clear edge after 20.Nc4! Bxe5 21.fxe5 Rb8 22.Rad1 ±, showing ...Rb6 was a waste of time. Black now gets his awkward rook to a better square.) 20...Rxd6 21.Nc4 Rdd8 22.Rad1 Rfe8 += 23.Bc2 Nb6 24.Qh5 f5 25.Nd6!? (25.Ne5 += occupying e5 was more natural. James always liked tactical shots.) 25...Re7 = 26.Nxc8 Qxc8 27.Rxd8+ Qxd8 28.Qe2 Nd5? (A weak move that allows White to activate his bishop. Right was 28...c4 stopping Qa6 and Bb3.) 29.Rd1 (Not a bad move, but White should have stopped Black's next with 29.Bb3) 29...c4 30.Qxc4 (30.Bxf5 exf5 31.Rxd5 Qxd5 32.Qxe7 g6 = HCE, which never occurred to me during the game.) 30...Qb6+ 31.Qd4 Qxb2 32.Bxf5 Nxc3?? (A gross blunder that his blunder should have lost. Best was 32...Qxc3 33.Bxe6+ Rxe6 34.Qxd5 Qe3+ when White's exposed king makes it hard to exploit the extra pawn.) 33.Bxe6+ (33.Qd8+ Kf7 34.Bxe6+ is a bloodbath, although the text is also winning.) 33...Kf8 34.Qd8+ Re8 35.Qd6+ (35.Qc7! Ne2+ 36.Kf1 Qf6 37.Bc4 forces resignation.) 35...Re7 36.Re1? = (36.Qd8+ Re8 37.Qc7 transposes into the note on move 35.) 36...Ne4 Draw. A terrible game by me, but at least I did better than Walter Browne! Studying this game for the first time in 41 years is sobering. It's less embarrassing than remembered, but worse than I thought! Computers are cold blooded truth tellers with little respect for one's feelings.

Three months later we're playing again!

James Hamblin (1967, age 24)
Curtis Carlson (2200, age 24)
Colorado Open / Round 4
September 3, 1978

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 (Humble eschews his Alapin, which is surprising after our last game) 2...d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6

6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.O-O-O Nbd7 10.Bd3 h6 11.Bh4 g5 12.Bg3!? (James avoids the well known 12.fgx5 Ne5 13.Qe2 Nfg4) 12...gxf4 13.Bh4 (13.Bxf4 e5 14.Nf5 exf4 gives inadequate compensation for the piece) 13...b5 (Not a bad move, but best was 13...Qc5! 14.Nce2 Rg8 =+ HCE.) 14.Bxf6?! (James wants to regain his pawn, but 14.Rhf1 Bb7 = HCE.) 14...Nxf6 15.e5? Bb7 -+ 16.Qh3 dxe5 17.Nxe6 Qc8? (Afraid of ghosts. Simply 17...fxe6 18.Bg6+ Kf8 19.Qxe6 Qc4 -+) 18.Ng7+ Kf8 19.Nf5 b4 20.Na4 Qc6? (Right was 20...Qc7 21.Rhe1 Re8 =+) 21.Nxe7 Kxe7 += And here James amazed me by resigning! After 22.Rhe1 e4 23.Qh4 Kf8 24.Bc4 ± White stands very well. 22.Qf5 = and 22.Rde1 = are also good. I assumed he saw something I hadn't, and hid my surprise. Unfortunately for me, in the next round tournament winner Randy Canney chose not to resign a winning position. You can't always get lucky, especially when you play badly.



When looking for pictures of James I came across this one I took of Korchnoi playing blitz with Browne at Lone Pine 1979.

Jay Whitehead is watching and learning.

It's hard to believe this was 40 years ago!

Time flies, but it really flies when you play chess.

I appreciate the opportunity to share games and memories. In *How Life Imitates Chess*, Garry Kasparov said he learned from his own books as he wrote them; I can relate, since I'm learning from my own articles! When I resumed submissions in 2016 (after a 35 year hiatus) I didn't expect to be remembering so many fallen comrades. I've played more than half a century and have seen many friends come and go. You never know who will be next.

IM Erik Kislik (author of the excellent *Applying Logic in Chess*) has many fine videos on YouTube - check them out!

<http://tinyurl.com/yjycuc6>

As always, you can email me at curt2309@comcast.net if there are any questions, comments, or corrections.

