

Another Good Man Gone: Mark Kriseler, 1958 - 2003

by Richard Buchanan

Mark Kriseler, former President of the CSCA, died December 16 in Birch Run, Michigan. He was 45 years old.

Mark grew up in Birch Run, where his parents and sister still live. He was in the Air Force from 1980 to 1986, and moved to Colorado after his discharge. He was elected CSCA President in 1988, and continued in that position until 1990, when he returned to Michigan. He was a major force in Colorado chess, organizing scores of tournaments and working very hard to promote scholastics chess. He approached chess with energy and enthusiasm. He loved the game and worked very hard to help others enjoy it, too. He especially liked fast chess, and ran lots of G/30 tournaments.

Still, his drive for the game was colored by a sometimes unreasonable hostility toward other organizers who he seemed to feel did not share his vision. He was not, alas, very diplomatic. Garth Courtois and Randy Seibert were two particular targets he focused on, and I have copies of long rambling letters in which he criticized these and others for offenses real or otherwise. The same was true of scholastic chess; he felt possessive of his many accomplishments in this area, and there was tension in his dealings with other people who might not do everything his way. In those days there was a President's Newsletter that would be sent out between issues of the Informant, and in these he would go on at great length on his views about people and events.

In spite of these faults, though, he was a great addition to Colorado chess. His leadership sent CSCA in directions it had not taken before. He helped set up the chess booth at the People's Fair, and worked toward setting up one-day fast tournaments. He ran many of these at the Wendy's in the 16th Street Mall.

As a player, Mark was as energetic and individualistic as he was as an organizer. He played tactically, and loved to sacrifice for attacks. His opening was almost always the same: 1 e3 followed by a queen-side fianchetto. Then as circumstances allowed, he aimed for a pawn push to f4 creating a sort of Bird Opening, Bb5, Nc3, queen-side castling, and a king-side pawn storm. If his knight on e3 was captured, he would reply dxc3 to open the d-file for his rook. As Black he would play exactly the same strategy. I dubbed this the Kriseler Opening (or as Black the Kriseler Defense) in the games I published as Editor of the Colorado Chess Informant. A few times he opened with 1 e4, and I joked that this was the Kriseler Extended (1 e4 being an extension of 1 e3) with the Primitive Variation of 1 e4 e5 2 Qh5.

I met Mark at the 1986 May Daze, which I believe was his first Colorado tournament. He played 1 e3, and I commented to him that the pawn was allowed to move two squares. He was rated 1845 then, and in the years to come his rating climbed into the 2100s, with occasional lapses. His USCF rating at the time of his death was only 1901.

Mark and I were close friends. We had a mutual respect and could tolerate each other's strange qualities. I thought his creativity and energy were welcome contrasts to others who had been in CSCA leadership. After he left Colorado, he wrote me and said how he had manipulated me into the Presidency by pressuring Ron Smits to resign and let me as perennial VP ascend to the Presidency. Years later I heard from him again marveling at my longevity in the post. I answered him briefly and kept intending to correspond with him regularly. But that which I should have done I did not do... ♖