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News Release

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Panchanathan Does it Again – Pulls Major Upset And Wins UTD’s 4th International Chess Tourney

Wins An Astounding Six Matches in a Row Against Strong Competition

RICHARDSON, Texas (Dec. 15, 2005) – Magesh Chandran Panchanathan, the hero of The University of Texas at Dallas’ upset win in the 2004 Pan American Intercollegiate Team Chess Championships when he almost effortlessly rolled over the top-ranked player in the United States while playing black, this week recorded a victory nearly as improbable as he out-pointed six higher-ranked, world-class players to win the UTD Grandmaster Invitational, one of the highest-level chess tournaments ever held in Texas.

To everyone but his defeated opponents, it may have seemed only fitting that the 22-year-old computer science major won a competition with the word “grandmaster” in its title – especially a tournament so prestigious as to be sanctioned by the world governing body of chess, FIDE (*Federation Internationale des Echecs*). For it was only a few months ago that Panchanathan, a senior at UTD, earned the third “norm” necessary for ascendancy to the highest ranking in all of chess, except world champion. The achievement was so recent, in fact, that his grandmaster ranking has not yet been formally authorized by FIDE, and, as a result, Panchanathan temporarily holds the diluted, rather less impressive sobriquet of “grandmaster-elect.”



UTD computer science major Magesh Panchanathan shocked the chess world last December by upsetting the highest-rated player in the United States.

Photo courtesy of Daa'im Shabazz and [The Chess Drum](#)

Perhaps spurred by some small measure of pique at the bureaucratic delay, Panchanathan – just as he had turned the chess world on its head by thoroughly dominating 29-year-old Grandmaster Alexander "Alex the Invincible" Onischuk of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) at the Pan Am nearly 12 months earlier – summarily brushed aside a sextet of high-caliber opposition, won a breathtaking six consecutive matches in Rounds 2 through 7 and - in yo bishop's face – audaciously and seemingly inexorably went on to earn a "superfluous" **FOURTH** norm (what a splendid touch!).

Panchanathan went on such a roll, in fact, that the 11-round tournament was virtually over by the end of Round 8. By then, Panchanathan already had amassed a virtually insurmountable 7.5 points to his nearest competitor's 5.5. Make no mistake about it, after nine days and 11 rounds of the most arduous chess possible against some of the best players in the world, the amiable young student in UTD's Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Science is now a grandmaster. Indeed, how could one say otherwise? He has just won the UTD Grandmaster Invitational with embarrassing ease.

Panchanathan, a native of India, entered the tournament with a chess rating of 2536 – very, very good but not quite great. But during his six consecutive victories, he defeated last year's co-champion, Grandmaster Igor Novikov, 43, of the Ukraine (chess rating of 2665), Grandmaster Alexander M. Goldin, 40, who was born in Russia but now lives in New York (chess rating of 2647) and the tournament's top seed, Grandmaster Varuzhan Akobian, 22, formerly of Armenia and Mongolia, now living in the U.S. (chess ranking of 2670). In the space of only six rounds, Panchanathan defeated three highly ranked grandmasters – spotting each of them more than 110 ratings points in the process. At this stratospheric level of chess, this kind of thing almost never happens, and it is difficult to think of an analogy from another individual sport. Do you believe in miracles?

Even two-time U.S. Chess Federation President Dr. Tim. Redman, founder and director of the UTD Chess Program and a serious chess player for many years, was impressed.

"Six straight wins in a tournament of this caliber is almost unheard of. That it included victories over all three of the world-class grandmasters that we brought in shows that Magesh is now playing at their elite level," said Redman, who is a professor of literary studies in UTD's School of Arts & Humanities. "Both our A and B teams will be in top form for our hoped-for three-peat in Miami at the Pan Am later this month."

Panchanathan won eight matches, drew two and lost only one during the tournament, for a total of nine points. Goldin and Akobian tied for second with 6 ½ points each. Tied for fourth with six points each were Novikov and two UTD students, both International Masters -- Dmitry Shneider, 21, of New York, a senior majoring in finance, and Peter M. Vavrak, 23, of Slovakia, a senior majoring in psychology. It was Vavrak, in Round One, who handed Panchanathan his lone defeat of the tournament.

Each of the 12 players faced each of the others once in the round-robin competition. In all, nine players from UTD participated in the event. Seven of them were International Masters, the level below Grandmaster. UTD's chess team is coached by International Master Rade Milovanovic.

UTD is believed to be the only university in the Western Hemisphere ever to have hosted a FIDE-rated tournament at this high of a level (Category 9 or Category 10). This year, in an effort to reach out to the local community and promote greater interest in UTD's Chess Program, tournament organizers held the UTD Grandmaster Invitational at the Richardson Civic Center and at the nearby First Bank of Canyon Creek instead of on the university campus, where the previous three events were held.

Panchanathan was even the star of the tournament's opening ceremonies on Dec. 6, defeating John Jacobs, senior vice president for economic development for the Richardson Chamber of Commerce, in two games of "speed chess," also known as "blitz chess," a variation of chess during which moves are made in rapid sequence. Jacobs is a FIDE master and was Texas state chess champion five times. He currently is president of the Dallas Area Chess In Schools Foundation.

Although UTD has had four grandmasters on its chess team during the team's 10-year existence, Panchanathan is the only UTD player ever to earn his grandmaster rating while a student at the university.

Former UTD Chess Team Captain Yuri Shulman won two of the previous FIDE-sanctioned international tournaments held at UTD outright, in 2001 and 2002 (those competitions were limited to coaches and players

from the UTD team), and he tied Novikov for first place in last year's higher-level invitational event. However, Grandmaster Shulman, who is originally from Belarus and now lives in New York, did not play in this year's UTD event because he was participating in a world championship competition.

UTD has a second grandmaster on its chess team this year in addition to Panchanathan. He is 17-year-old Alejandro Ramirez of Costa Rica, who is majoring in physics. Ramirez, one of the youngest grandmasters in the world and the only grandmaster ever from Central America, did not play in the UTD event because of an activity involving the university's prestigious McDermott Scholars Program. Ramirez, however, is expected to play for UTD in the Pan Am team competition in Miami later this month.

Redman served as FIDE arbiter for the UTD tournament along with Luis Salinas, assistant director of the UTD Chess Program and president of the Dallas Chess Club.

About UTD

The University of Texas at Dallas, located at the convergence of Richardson, Plano and Dallas in the heart of the complex of major multinational technology corporations known as the Telecom Corridor, enrolls nearly 14,500 students. The school's freshman class traditionally stands at the forefront of Texas state universities in terms of average SAT scores. The university offers a broad assortment of bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs. For additional information about UTD, please visit the university's website at www.utdallas.edu.