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Michael Franett 1941-2004

by Jonathan Berry

My old friend Michael Franett died peacefully, of an apparent heart attack in his sleep, on December 2, 2004 in Seattle. He was 63.

For all but a bit of the dozen years of *Inside Chess* magazine, Michael was the editor. He organized, negotiated, paginated, and made it comprehensible. Throughout, he adhered to two tenets: Get the magazine out on time, and "avoid the horrible." For example, Issue 1 of Volume 1 had the wrong year printed on the cover, the kind of error which Michael did not allow to pass when it became his turn.

Schooled by the Jesuits, Michael had a variety of careers: soldier, medical orderly, taxi driver, bartender, chef ... which gave him a rich but unromanticized view of life. He was well-informed on many subjects, was a voracious reader (not just in chess), and also liked sports (particularly basketball and American football, both professional and college).

As a chess player, he had been Washington State Champion. His understanding of strategy let him play even with grandmasters sometimes, but on other occasions his disdain for detail could lead to debacles against lesser players. An editor who disdained detail? His work was in broad strokes. There was a copy editor and a proofreader for that other stuff.

After *Inside Chess*, he did some writing at Chess Cafe and also taught chess in the schools in his native Seattle.

by John Donaldson

I knew Michael for 25 years. Back in 1979 I recruited him to play for the Seattle entry in the National Telephone League, and he became a key member of the team that finished the season tied for third in the country.

Michael was an unusual chess player.

Most start playing and continue for life, many quit once and come back again, but few come and go with regularity. Michael was one such player. He learned to play in his early teens. He first appears in the *Washington Chess Letter* (today's *Northwest Chess*) in 1957 so it's probably safe to say he learned to play a year or two earlier. He was a frequent visitor to the Seattle Chess Club throughout the late 1950s, but his defining moment came when he joined the Seattle Chess Center not long after it opened in the summer of 1957.

The first of what would be many Washington State Championships for Michael saw him finishing third in 1960 behind Jim McCormick and Viktors Pupols. The following year he was 6th as the field in the State Championship expanded to a 12-player round robin. He was again 3rd in 1962 in what would be his last state championship for some time.

Michael's first break from the game was from roughly 1964-1967. Some of this time must have coincided with his tour of duty in the U.S. Army, where he served as a medic and was based in Germany. Back in Seattle in the late 1960s, he resumed playing and won the first of three state titles in 1970 at the Seattle Chess Club.

He disappeared a second time from 1973 until, as mentioned earlier, he played for the Seattle Rain in the NTL. This comeback was short-lived. He took part in the 1980 and 1981 State Championships, but shortly after went into hibernation again, not to emerge until he was rescued from a job driving a cab for Farwest Taxi. His salvation was becoming a staff member of Yasser Seirawan's new magazine, *Inside Chess*, at the end of 1987. Michael was listed on the first issue as a staff member, and later held the titles of production manager, associate editor, managing editor and finally plain old editor. He held this job until *Inside Chess* retired as a print magazine at the beginning of 2000.

It is hard to explain just how essential Michael was for *Inside Chess*, a magazine that for most of its existence was a 32-page, twice a month, magazine. That works out to around 750 pages a year, and not small pages! Multiply that by 12 years and you have around 9000 pages and Michael worked on every one, doing whatever was needed. He did the page layout, entered copy and edited. Producing a few magazines over a few months can be fun, doing it for years with strict deadlines requires professionalism.

Michael was an excellent writer and you can see examples from his column "The Wanderer" at the *Chess Cafe* website (<http://www.chesscafe.com/fromarchive/fromarchive.htm>), but what he really liked was editing. The

readability of the magazine benefited immensely from the surgery he performed on articles written by chess players whose second language was English, and some for whom it was their native tongue! Like the former *Chess Life* editor Burt Hochberg, Michael had the ability to rewrite material in such a way that the original writer's voice was still heard and didn't sound like the editor *ad nauseam*. This is a very rare ability. It might seem a stretch to compare Michael with some of the great American editors of the past like Hermann Helms who produced the *American Chess Bulletin* from 1904 until 1963 or I.A. Horowitz and his *Chess Review* which started in 1933 and merged with *Chess Life* in 1969, but I believe the comparison is fair. His efforts were recognized by his peers when he received the Chess Journalist of the Year award in 1999.

Michael was a true friend to those who knew him well. He will be sorely missed by many.

The following game was annotated by Michael and GM Lubomir Ftacnik for *Chess Informant* 52.

MODERN BENONI

[A68]

W: M. Franett

B: R. Gutman

Portland, 1991

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 0-0 5 f4 d6 6 Nf3 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Be2 exd5 9 cxd5 Bg4 10 h3 Bxf3 11 Bxf3 Re8 12 0-0 a6 13 a4 Nbd7 14 Qc2 Qc7

A novelty 14 ... c4 — was tried in *Informant* 30, game 158.

15 a5 c4 16 Be3 Nc5?!

16 ... Rac8

17 e5! Nfd7

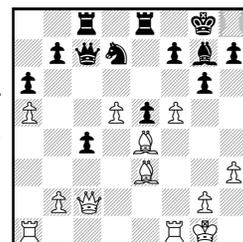
17 ... dxe5! 18 fxe5 Rxe5 19 Bf4 Nfd7 was worth considering with White somewhat better.

18 Ne4 Nxe4

Here 18 ... dxe5 19 d6 Qc8 20 Nxc5 Nxc5 21 Qxc4 left White with a clear advantage.

19 Bxe4 dxe5

Or 19 ... Rac8 20 e6 fxe6 21 dxe6 Nc5 22 Bd5 and White is on top.



after 20 ... Rac8

20 f5 Rac8 (diagram)

As 20 ... Nf6 21 Bb6 Qc8 22 Ra4 is better for White.

21 d6! Qxd6 22 fxg6 hxg6

On 22 ... fxg6 23 Bxb7 Rb8 24 Rad1 Qe7 25 Bxa6 White is winning.

23 Rad1 Qc7

Or 23 ... Qe7 24 Bxb7 Rb8 25 Bxa6 and Black is defenseless.

24 Bd5 Nf6 25 Rxf6! Bxf6 26 Qxg6+ Bg7 27 Bh6 Qc5+ 28 Kh1 Qf8 29 Bxg7 Qxg7 30 Bxf7+ Kf8 31 Bxe8, 1-0.