

Boise boy invited to represent U.S. in chess

The 9-year-old could go to Vietnam for the World Youth Chess Championships

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Boise's 9-year-old chess champion, Luke Harmon-Vellotti, is preparing for a trip to a chess tournament in **Vietnam**.

Harmon-Vellotti is the top-rated player for his age group in the country, according to the United States Chess Federation, a nonprofit organization that governs competitive chess in the United States. He's been playing chess since he was 4, and with both parents involved in the family business of teaching chess, he gets plenty of practice at home.

This year for the first time, Harmon-Vellotti was invited to represent the United States at the World Youth Chess Championships. The tournament runs Oct. 19-30 in the southern beach city of Vung Tau, and is expected to attract more than 1,500 competitors from 100 countries.

"It's the first time Luke's ever been invited to play outside of the country. It's a big deal," said his mother, Ava Vellotti. The family lives in Northwest Boise in the Collister neighborhood.

"It's a prestigious event to go to, and he could do very well."

Luke Harmon-Vellotti is no ordinary fourth-grader. He's home-schooled some of the time, and he's also the youngest student at the Treasure Valley Math and Science Center, the Boise School District program for advanced math and science students.

The principal there, Holly McLean, said Luke Harmon-Vellotti is extraordinarily advanced, earning very strong grades while doing upper-level high school work.

"He's a young man who constantly takes us by surprise with his capabilities," said McLean. "He's such a modest young man. He has a sense of humor. He takes delight in life."

Dick Vandenburg, 78, has been playing chess competitively in Idaho since he was a senior at Boise High in 1947. He won his first state chess title in 1955.

Vandenburg, who started an Idaho scholastic chess program in 1980 and organized several regional tournaments, said he has never seen a player like Luke Harmon-Vellotti in Idaho. He's known adults who can play at Luke Harmon-Vellotti's level, but "not anywhere near his age, never," he said. "He's so darned young.

"He's a nice guy; I like him," added Vandenburg. "He goes out and plays; he's a regular kid."

Luke Harmon-Vellotti wants to raise awareness of chess in Idaho, and hopes to become the youngest U.S.- born chess Grandmaster. For a career, he'd like to be a pediatric surgeon, his mother said.

Ava Vellotti said it would cost about \$10,000 to get her family of four to the seaside city of Vung Tau for the tournament. Once there, only Luke's accommodations are covered. Some countries sponsor their top chess players.

But the United States doesn't, so the family is asking for help from friends and strangers. They have set up a Web site, www.SponsorLuke.com, that's seeking not just money but other items that might come in handy, such as frequent flyer miles.

"Having the honor to represent the United States in chess means a great deal to Luke, and he has worked very hard to earn this privilege," his mother said.

www.SponsorLuke.com
