Homeschool Chess Team Not Allowed to Defend State Title

By Ray Parker
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TUCSON, AZ -- The young chess players were the first such champions in Arizona.

But a team of homeschool students from the southeast Valley, called the Chevalier Noir (Black Knight) Academy, was shut out last weekend from competing, not allowed to defend its title in the Arizona Scholastic Chess Championship held in Tucson.

State chess officials allowed the homeschool students to play as teams for two years because of changing or unclear national rules on the subject, but this year, they ruled team members must come from the same school.

"The tournaments were created and designed for school teams," said Will Wharton, president of the Arizona Chess Federation board. "The problem is their connection is just chess, they’re not doing any schooling together."

Joan Harmonick, a home educator in Mesa, thought she had made progress with both the Arizona Chess Federation and the U.S. Chess Federation, the largest chess organization in the nation.

"I understand some of their concerns, but we were working with them and hoping they would broaden chess," said Harmonick.

Roger Brownell, a homeschool parent in Tucson who was on a state chess committee looking into the matter, agreed with the final ruling. If homeschool students were allowed to form teams, he said, it would be like allowing sport teams to take students from any geographical area.

But homeschool proponents look at the chess world as way behind the times, especially since public education has changed so much with increasing numbers of charter and magnet schools, which take students from all over, just like private and parochial schools.

Harmonick wanted the youngsters to be given a chance to defend their title in the kindergarten through sixth-grade category, which last weekend went to three school teams with the same scores: Phoenix Country Day School, Harelson Elementary and Khalsa Montessori, both in Tucson.
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