

## Down in Malta

IF THE 1978 Buenos Aires men's Olympiad was a great landmark in New Zealand chess history, then the 1980 Olympiad in Malta must rank as one of our all-time lows. For a country with as much native talent as we have to finish in 56th equal position from 82 countries indicates that something has gone seriously wrong, and considerable soul searching is needed to find out where.

The sorry crosstable below tells the story. My own performance was undistinguished, while Sarapu, one of the heroes from two years previously, was badly off form. Small won only a single game against mediocre opposition, and suffered from the team disease of gaining excellent positions and then letting them slip to draws or losses. Both Aptekar and Anderson had played virtually no serious chess in the preceding months, and were in fluctuating form.

It is not uncommon for one or two members of a team to be off form. But when, as in this case, the whole team performs below par there must be a reason. Anyone who was present in Malta would not have to look far to find an explanation — lack of team spirit.

And why was the morale so low? The poor Maltese food and accommodation took their toll, as did the bouts of colds and flu which struck the Olympiad as a whole. But much of the blame must, I am sad to say, fall on the shoulders of NZCA, the New Zealand Chess Association.

This is not to detract in any way from the perfectly adequate job Peter Stuart, president of NZCA, did as our captain and manager during the event. But for too long now NZCA has not faced up to its responsibilities.

Where, for instance, were two of our most promising young players, Craig Laird and Roger Nokes? Laird was national champion in 1977/78 and has subsequently been active in Australia and now Europe. Roger Nokes finished clear fourth in the 1979/80 championship, and won the 1980 South Island championship. Yet neither of these two was included by the selectors.

The players who were picked, then had to find the bulk of the airfares themselves, apart from a 20 per cent government grant. The team was in

no condition to play on arrival because NZCA had booked roundabout airline routes, increasing the already substantial flying time.

Certain young stars have risen in New Zealand, shone brightly for a while, and then their enthusiasm has faded or they have given up altogether. They feel there is nowhere to go, no one to play, and what chances they do have, have been, in the past, all too often jeopardised by the negative approach of NZCA.

Let us have sensible selection policies. We need more activity and to encourage our top players, and our youngsters, at every opportunity — awarding a special place to the New Zealand junior champion in the senior championship is one such possibility. We should be represented internationally as much as we possibly can — the Asian junior championship, with an international master title to the winner, is a prime example. Raising fares is never easy, but several active clubs have proved that, with the right effort, it can be done.

As a possible first step, I would like to suggest the formation of a Leading Players Association, composed of the top men and women players in New Zealand. This organisation would look after the interests of our top people, promote strong tournaments, make sure our junior players get the invitations to strong New Zealand and international events, and encourage the necessary fund-raising schemes to get them there.

Such an organisation might also prevent a repeat occurrence of one of the worst incidents in recent times, when our "champion of the century" Ortvin Sarapu was barred from going to the 1976 Haifa Olympiad in Israel because of his refusal to sign a restrictive document NZCA had dreamed up. Among other things, the document stipulated that no one was to talk to the press(!), go out for walks alone, or other such provocative things.

Anyone who has any thoughts on the formation of a Leading Players Association is invited to write to me (quickly please, there is another Olympiad next year!).

MURRAY CHANDLER

NZ men's performance, MALTA OLYMPIAD 1980

	Algeria	Sweden	Malaysia	Indonesia	Belgium	Ireland	Italy	Greece	Mexico	Thailand	Guyana	Mongolia	Syria	Pakistan	POINTS	PLAYED	Percentage
M. CHANDLER	—	0	1 ½	1	1	½	0	—	0	1	½	½	1	7	12	58.33	
O. SARAPU	1	0	1	0	—	½	0	½	0	½	—	½	0	—	4	11	36.36
V. SMALL	½	—	1	0	½	½	—	½	½	—	½	½	0	0	4½	11	40.91
L. APTEKAR	1	0	—	½	0	—	½	1	0	½	1	—	½	0	5	11	45.45
B. ANDERSON	1	0	1	—	½	½	0	—	1	0	1	½	—	0	5½	11	50.00
TEAM TOTAL	3½	0	4	1	2	2½	1	2	1½	1	3½	2	1	1	26	56	46.43