

# CHECKMATE CANCER 2026

RECAP BY NIKHIL MURUGAN

JULY 16 & 18, 2026 • CARMEL & WESTFIELD, IN

**It has been a few weeks** since Checkmate Cancer 2026, and now that everything has settled down a little, I wanted to look back at what we were able to accomplish and, most importantly, thank everyone who helped us.

Across the GM Sam Khanin Simultaneous Exhibition on July 16 and the Scholastic and Open tournaments on July 18, our community raised **\$5,132.78** for the American Cancer Society.

When Arnav and I first started planning this, we really didn't know how big it would become. What started as an idea between two high school students eventually brought together chess players, parents, local businesses, volunteers, a Grandmaster, and organizations from around Central Indiana. Seeing so many people come together to support the cause was probably the most rewarding part of the whole experience.

## 👑 How Checkmate Cancer Started

Checkmate Cancer was organized by the **American Cancer Society Club at Carmel High School**, with the help of **Summit Chess Club**, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit based in Carmel.

Arnav Samuel and I co-founded the American Cancer Society Club at Carmel High School and serve as its co-presidents. We started the club because we wanted to create a way for Carmel High School students to support the American Cancer Society through fundraising, awareness, and community involvement.

When we started thinking about our first major fundraiser, we wanted to do something that could actually bring a community together instead of simply asking people for donations. I founded Summit Chess Club in 2023 and had already been organizing chess tournaments, free chess meetups, lessons, and other community chess programs through SCC. So chess seemed like a natural way to do it. We thought, why not bring the two together and use chess to raise money for the American Cancer Society? That simple idea eventually became Checkmate Cancer 2026.

The ACS Club organized the fundraiser, while Summit Chess Club helped us with the chess side of the events, including tournament organization, equipment, directing, registration, and connections within the Indiana chess community. Arnav and I also spent a lot of time reaching out to businesses, finding sponsors and donors, promoting the fundraiser, and working through all the details needed to make the events happen. We honestly didn't know how people would respond when we started reaching out for support. The response ended up being much bigger than we expected.

## 👑 Thank You to Our Sponsors

One of the biggest surprises for me was how many businesses and organizations were willing to support an event being organized by high school students. For some of them, it really was as simple as sending an email explaining who we were, what we were trying to do, and where the money was going. Businesses that had never met us before trusted us and wanted to help.

**We are forever grateful to all of our amazing sponsors.** Some supported us financially, while others donated products, gift cards, services, or venue space — every contribution helped us get closer to our goal:

IMI ♦ Brite Systems ♦ Metamor Systems ♦ AV Tech Solutions ♦ UTZ Brands ♦ Magdalen Bergeron Realtor ♦ Forthright Real Estate, LLC  
♦ NIAM Realty & Property Management ♦ Kid City, Westfield ♦ Carmel Christian Church ♦ Full Moon Rentals ♦ Carmel 100 ♦ Josephine ♦  
Savor ♦ Matador ♦ Puccini's ♦ Monterey Coastal Cuisine ♦ St. Louis Chess Club ♦ Merrimac Chess Club ♦ Penn & Beech Candle Co ♦  
Tyler Mason Salon + Spa ♦ GourmetGiftBaskets.com

## 👑 GM Sam Khanin Simultaneous Exhibition

Checkmate Cancer began on July 16 with a simultaneous exhibition by Grandmaster Sam Khanin at Carmel Christian Church. GM Khanin volunteered his time and took on 28 players at once.



For several players, this was their first opportunity to ever sit across the board from a Grandmaster, which made the evening even more special. A special shoutout goes to John Herr, James Graham, and Jayden Peters for putting up great fights against GM Khanin.

This was also GM Khanin's second time supporting an event with Summit Chess Club, and I really appreciate his willingness to come back and help us with this fundraiser. The simul alone raised **\$560**, with every dollar going toward the fundraiser.

**Thank you so much, GM Sam,** for donating your time and your talent to this cause. Having a Grandmaster show up and take on 28 players at once for a charity fundraiser is not something every club gets to say, and we are so lucky to have you in our corner.

## 👑 Thank You to Our Venue Sponsors

We could not have held these events without **Carmel Christian Church** and **Kid City USA, Westfield**.

**Carmel Christian Church**'s tagline is "Come as you are!" and honestly, that's exactly how they've treated Summit Chess Club from the very beginning. They opened their doors to a high school student running a chess club out of nothing, and they've kept opening them every single Thursday since for our free weekly chess meetups, no membership fees, no meeting fees, just kids and adults showing up to play and learn. Carmel Christian Church also hosted this year's GM simul. Having a dependable, welcoming space every week has been a huge part of allowing us to keep chess accessible to the community, and I'm endlessly grateful for their trust and support.

**Kid City USA, Westfield** hosted both tournaments on July 18. We had the Scholastic tournament in the morning and then turned around and ran the Open tournament that afternoon. Hosting two tournaments back to back takes a lot of space and coordination, and Kid City made it possible for us to do both comfortably.

Thank you to both venues for believing in our programs and supporting this fundraiser.

## 👑 Checkmate Cancer Scholastic

Saturday morning started with the Checkmate Cancer Scholastic, with young players competing across four sections: Reigning Royals, Bold Bishops, Noble Knights, and Rising Pawns. There were some great games and several very close finishes. Congratulations to our top finishers:

### Reigning Royals

|                |                            |       |
|----------------|----------------------------|-------|
| <b>1st</b>     | Parker Andrew Reehling     | 3/3   |
| <b>2nd-3rd</b> | Ivan Lu & Jadon L Fernando | 2.5/3 |

### Noble Knights

|                |                                                |     |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>1st</b>     | Dhruv Thakkar                                  | 4/4 |
| <b>2nd</b>     | Yuvaan Kararaparthi                            | 3/4 |
| <b>3rd-6th</b> | Olivia Law, Paxon Laflower, Isha Arun & Ian Li | 2/4 |

### Bold Bishops

|                |                                                 |       |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>1st</b>     | Adam Li                                         | 3/3   |
| <b>2nd</b>     | Varun Viswanathan                               | 2.5/3 |
| <b>3rd-4th</b> | Viyana Magizhan Sakthivel & Kristopher Ratzburg | 2/3   |

### Rising Pawns

|                |                                                                                 |     |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>1st-4th</b> | Chanave Newton Laojavachakul, James T Parsons, David Ciorciari & Ayush Banerjee | 3/4 |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|



REIGNING ROYALS



BOLD BISHOPS



NOBLE KNIGHTS



RISING PAWNS

Congratulations to all of our Scholastic winners and to every young player who participated. For some, this was another tournament in a long list of events. For others, it was one of their first tournament experiences. Either way, every player who entered was also helping us raise money for the American Cancer Society.

Full crosstable: [ratings.uschess.org/event/202607180103](https://ratings.uschess.org/event/202607180103)

## 👑 Checkmate Cancer Open

Once the Scholastic tournament wrapped up, we reset the rooms and got ready to do it all over again for the Checkmate Cancer Open that afternoon. The Open featured three sections, Pro, Reserve, and Novice, and gave us another afternoon of competitive chess.



### Pro

|                |                                                                         |       |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>1st-4th</b> | Mohamed K Elshazly, Dominic Xavier Bobay, James A Mills & Madison Brown | 3/4   |
| <b>5th</b>     | John Martin Hawkins                                                     | 2.5/4 |

### Novice

|                |                                                                   |       |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>1st-2nd</b> | Alvin Yang & James S. Hiatt II                                    | 3.5/4 |
| <b>3rd-5th</b> | Saket Sharma, Vaidyanathan Viswanathan Saunak & R Michael Dugdale | 3/4   |



### Reserve

|                |                                                            |       |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>1st</b>     | Aarush Dolli                                               | 3.5/4 |
| <b>2nd-4th</b> | Jerika Lenore Eppel, Donald Edward Winslow & Jayden Peters | 3/4   |

Congratulations to all of our winners and, just as importantly, to everyone who came out and played. A few of our prize winners even chose to donate their prize money back to the fundraiser. We never asked anyone to do that, which made those gestures mean even more. It really showed what this event was about: competing hard over the board while coming together for something much bigger outside of it.

The feedback was great across the board. Parents especially appreciated the little things: we set up tents for extra shaded space, had complimentary cookies and water out, and ran a discounted sale on chess sets and gift cards. The venue itself was well lit with plenty of room for players and parents to hang out between rounds. We also set aside a separate room for the pro-level players, and a few of them told us afterward that it really helped them without the noise and traffic of the main hall.

## 👑 Individual Donors and Community Support

Beyond our sponsors, a number of people made personal donations simply because they wanted to help. Some of them couldn't even make it out to play in the tournaments themselves, but they gave anyway, purely out of love for the game and a desire to support the cause. A special thank you to:

**Robert Banta ♦ David Airey ♦ Kevin Lee ♦ Mrs. Minner ♦ Riley McCulloch ♦ Sahitya Mallipeddi & Abhiram Maddela ♦ Nathaniel Criss ♦ Tony Passwater ♦ Jay Carr ♦ Ganapathi Vaddadi ♦ R Michael Dugdale ♦ Terrence LeMaster ♦ Gabriel Hawkins & John Martin Hawkins ♦ James Ramp ♦ Donald Winslow ♦ Anonymous Donors ♦ All Participants**

## 👑 Thank You to the Parents

I also want to thank all of the parents. Chess tournaments don't happen without parents driving players to the venue, waiting through rounds, helping younger players, finding lunch between games, and staying much longer than they probably expected. Many parents also donated, volunteered, helped clean up, and stepped in whenever we needed an extra hand. Thank you for supporting your players and for supporting what we were trying to accomplish.

## 👑 Volunteers and Friends

There were also a lot of people working behind the scenes. A big thank you to **Viresh Dolli** and family, **Kumaran Murugiah** and family, **Arnav**, and **Ashok Kurup**, along with everyone else who helped with setup, teardown, registration, tournament logistics, and all of the little things that come up when you're trying to run multiple events.

A special thanks to all my friends who volunteered: **Abdul Wasif**, **Suvan Vaddadi**, **Arnav Samuel**, and **Krishna Chouturi**. I also want to thank **Madison Brown**'s family for voluntarily helping us spread the word about Checkmate Cancer.

## 👑 Photo Credits

Every photo in this recap was taken by three Carmel High School friends who also happen to be really talented photographers. **Rethika** (@rethikas.photography on Instagram), **Drithi Raipet**, and **Kodai Fujita** (@fujitaflcks on Instagram) volunteered their time and their skills to help us cover the event. Because of them, we have photos of the players, volunteers, awards, and moments throughout the fundraiser that Arnav and I probably didn't even get to see while we were busy running everything.

## 👑 \$5K+ Raised Together

**\$5K+**

RAISED FOR ACS

**3**

EVENTS, 1 CAUSE

**22**

BUSINESS SPONSORS

*A GM simul, a Scholastic tournament, and an Open tournament, all in one weekend, all for the American Cancer Society.*

At the end of everything, Checkmate Cancer 2026 raised **\$5,132.78** for the American Cancer Society. Seeing that final number was pretty incredible.

When Arnav and I started talking about doing a chess fundraiser, we had no idea whether it would raise a few hundred dollars or a few thousand. We just knew we wanted to try something that combined an important cause with a community I had been part of for years. But the final amount isn't something the two of us could have raised on our own.

It came from businesses that answered our emails and agreed to sponsor us. It came from GM Sam Khanin volunteering his time. It came from Carmel Christian Church and Kid City giving us places to hold the events. It came from individual donors, volunteers, parents, friends, and everyone who helped spread the word. And, of course, it came from every player who signed up and sat down at a chessboard.

A special thank you as well to all the **local chess clubs** who helped spread the word about Checkmate Cancer within the Indiana chess community. That kind of support from fellow clubs made a real difference in getting players to show up.

To all of our tournament winners, congratulations. To everyone who played, thank you for participating. And to everyone who sponsored, donated, volunteered, shared our fundraiser, provided a venue, took pictures, helped set up tables, stayed late to clean up, or supported us in any other way: thank you for helping Arnav and me turn an idea we had at Carmel High School into more than \$5,000 for the American Cancer Society.



*Chess gave us a way to bring everyone together. The community is what made it work.*

**TOGETHER, WE CHECKMATED CANCER**

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