



# Louis Giarrusso

## 1923-2024

BY RICK MASSIMO

AT THE BOARD AND AWAY FROM IT, Lou Giarrusso kept moving.

Lou passed away Sept. 9 at 101. He was the oldest active player in US Chess, having played in six tournaments this year, the last one in April.

Louis Giarrusso was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1923 and moved to Providence, Rhode Island, at age 9. He served at Leyte and Okinawa — two of the most horrific battles of World War II — and spent three months as part of the U.S. occupation force in Japan. When he returned, he got married, went to college and worked for General Electric for 39 years, converting manual offices to computer-based workplaces.

He didn't start playing chess until he was 40, but he managed to put together a lifetime of experience anyway.

In an interview conducted a couple of weeks before his passing, he said he got interested in the game in 1963, when he saw a picture in James DiDomenico's column in the *Providence Journal*. The game looked "old," he said from his home in Cranston, Rhode Island, and inspired him to think, "Now why in the world would you be looking at something that's very old and trying to figure out [the] problem?" He started going to the Rhode Island Chess Club, in Providence, and he was a constant presence on the Rhode Island chess scene for decades, especially at the Cranston-Warwick Chess Club, which moved to East Providence upon reopening after the pandemic.

"He's a fixture at our club," Mark Neale, president of the East Providence club, said in August. "I think he's been going there longer than I have. If he's not there, everyone's worried, and we want to go check on him."

It was never difficult to spot Lou in a tournament room, with his omnipresent baseball cap (often one commemorating his fellow veterans) and quick, beaming smile. It's also difficult to forget the way he



combined his will to win with his friendly, gentlemanly conduct, neither quality yielding to the other.

"He wants to win," Frank DelBonis, of Ocean State Chess, said during a conversation in August. "He's not just there for moral support." But even after a loss, DelBonis added, Lou's sportsmanship was "at the top level. He makes you feel like he's happy that you won. I'm sure he's not, but he's always got something nice to say."

Neale agreed: "He's always friendly; he's the most humble player, win or lose. I think maybe that's also the secret to a long life: It's just a game."

Lou's computer background showed in his take on chess, which he described as "an incomplete problem that constantly needs to be solved." Referring to the statistic that claims the number of possible chess games is equal to 1 with 120 zeroes after it, he said, "I'm not hitting 120, [but] I feel that I'm there to help solve it."

In this 2014 game sportingly provided by Mark Neale, Lou, 91 at the time, was up against an opponent rated nearly 300 points higher who only needed a draw to take clear

first. The game went back and forth, but thanks to some alert tactical play on the attack and in defense, Lou came out on top.

### TWO KNIGHTS DEFENSE (C55)

Louis Giarrusso (1371)

Mark Neale (1742)

December Monthly (4), Cranston, 12.23.2014

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Nf6 4. Nc3 Be7
5. d4 d6 6. d5 Na5 7. Be2 b6 8. 0-0 0-0
9. h3 h6 10. Bd2 Nb7 11. Be3 Nc5 12. Bxc5 bxc5 13. Bc4 Nh7 14. a3 f5

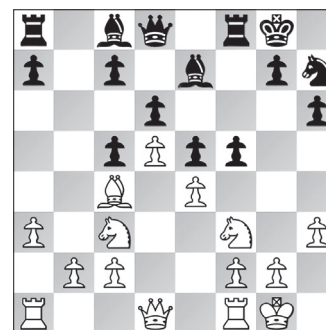


PHOTO: COURTESY FRANK DELBONIS



Left: Scenes from the 2023 and 2024 celebrations in Lou's honor. Right: Lou in 2017 (and 1943) heading off on a Honor Flight.

**c3 d4 48. cxd4  
cxd4 49. Ke4 g5  
50. Kxd4 Kf5 51.  
Ke3 g4 52. Rh1  
c5 53. Rxh5+,  
Black resigned.**

Lou also remained physically active — his daughter, Patricia Giarrusso, says he was driving himself to the gym three times a week until this spring.

All that activity and good health paid off in many ways: Despite being in his late 90s, Lou was able to spend nearly two years caring for his wife, Louise, who was able to stay at home before she passed away in 2022 after 73 years of marriage.

Then Lou returned to the game he loved, and to the chess community that loved him.

"Lou's special," DelBonis said. "Everyone loves Lou."

He wasn't kidding. In 2023, Ocean State Chess organized a tournament for Lou's centennial; it was the most-attended Rhode Island tournament of the year. This year, what could they do but hold another one? And it's the most-attended Rhode Island tournament of this year so far.

Lou said the centennial tournament was "very satisfying," but he couldn't play in this year's edition because "I was involved in too many things" — his way of referring to his health problems.



But he hadn't given up. "My big aim is to become completely done from other things and get into chess again," he said.

In the meantime, he played occasional 10-minute games online (that computer background again) and plotted his return to the game that kept him young — it was very common for people meeting Lou for the first time to underestimate his age by a good 20 years.

Wayne Powers, who came up with the idea for the centenary tournaments, said that Lou once told him "He sat down at his house and watched TV for a few hours and said, 'This doesn't feel right.' And he was 100 at the time. He's an inspiration."

If you knew him, he still is.

"Every time I've reached a new milestone in my age," Lou said, "when I got to be 80 and 90 — and when I got to be 100, wow — the question was 'What do you do to keep the longevity?' I have only one answer to that: Keep active. Don't sit down. If you do, you become a couch potato."

That goes for the brain too, doesn't it?

"It sure does." ♠

**15. Nxe5 Ng5 16. Ng6 Rf6 17. Nxe7+ Qxe7  
18. exf5 Bxf5 19. Re1 Qf7 20. h4 Nh3+ 21.  
gxh3 Rg6+ 22. Kh2 Bxh3 23. Qe2 Bg4 24.  
Qe3 Rf6 25. Ne4 Rf3 26. Qd2 Rh3+ 27. Kg1  
Rh1+ 28. Kxf1 Qf3+ 29. Kg1 Bh3 30. Bf1  
Bxf1 31. Kxf1 Qh1+ 32. Ke2 Qxe4+ 33. Kd1  
Qxh4 34. Qe2 Qd4+ 35. Kc1 Qxd5 36. Qe6+  
Qxe6 37. Rxe6 Kf7 38. Re2 h5 39. Kd2 Re8  
40. Rxe8 Kxe8 41. Rh1 g6 42. Ke3 Kf7 43.  
Kf4 Kf6 44. Rg1 d5 45. b3 a5 46. a4 c6 47.**