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Science and checkers

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SCIENCE AND CHECKERS

Within a time span of three months after the ICGA events in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in June 2007 three notable events occurred. They vary from a quite sad announcement to gloriously heralding two successes that deserved to be communicated widely and broadly within our community.

Let me start with the sad news. On July 7 Donald Michie and his former wife Ann McLaren were travelling from Cambridge to London, were involved in a car accident, and died. It was a shock to our community, to the English scientific world, and to the world at large. Donald had earned much recognition for his research during the Second World War in close collaboration with Alan Turing at Bletchley Park. Yet, the fame of his former wife Ann McLaren with whom he lived (again) together after the death of his wife Jean Hayes and his retirement from Glasgow/Edinburgh, might even be larger than his own. In retrospect, Donald and Ann were a perfect couple to whom the scientific world should say: thank you, Ann, thank you, Donald, for your contributions to science.

In the current issue David Levy gives an extensive and insightful account of Donald's life and his ideas for motivating young researchers. I may call myself a follower of Donald's ideas. His keynote lecture on the Human Window at the Advances in Computer Chess Conference in London 1981 inspired me to choose the following title for my inaugural address at the Universiteit Maastricht: *Informatica en het Menselijk Blikveld* (Computer Science and the Human Window). Three years later, inspired by Michie in the domain of chess and by Turing through his paper *Can Machines Think* I took as title for my inaugural address in Leiden: *Kunnen Computers Rechtspreken?* (Can Computers Judge Court Cases?). David Levy provides many more examples of Michie's stimulating efforts. In search of memories of Donald we found a picture of Bletchley researchers after a 12-board chess match, but Donald was missing. So, we are grateful to the Michie family for providing us the right to reproduce some of their Website pictures. We wish them strength with their loss.

Meanwhile the world is continuing its activities. At the end of July, Professor Jonathan Schaeffer saw all his efforts and those of his team members result in a thrilling publication in *Science*. On the solution of Checkers.

To start with the end, the game is scientifically proved to be a draw by the Schaeffer team. This result is

achieved after 18 years of research. Moving to the beginning, after the World Computer-Chess Championship in Edmonton, Alberta in 1989, Schaeffer moved from chess to checkers. He himself is a genuine chess-player but he saw the potential for scientific results by continuing the early work on learning by Arthur Samuel (1959, 1963). He gloriously succeeded and our community may be proud of such an ardent researcher, who has inspired many junior researchers to go their way. The ICGA congratulates our former secretary/treasurer and looks forward to receiving the “true” story of the team result to be published in the December issue, together with some technical algorithmic details. We congratulate all authors with their publication in the July issue of *Science*.

The third event concerns an announcement. On October 11, 2007 ICGA President David Levy defended his Ph.D. thesis, titled *Intimate Relationships with Artificial Partners*. Currently, the press (even the world press) has shown interest in his scientific endeavours. Indeed, the title is intriguing, and reading the thesis does not diminish your expectations in any way. However, the very true statements that are put forward are without any claim on being spectacular or being wild. No, not at all. His analysis is profound and based on a plethora of results that have been published in the literature.

What David did is simply putting a new brick in our scientific building. Some regard his brick as being extraordinary. For a better perspective, we refer to a variety of websites that commented on the publication. The title of his thesis is sufficient for Google to provide you with many references.

In summary, in the December issue we will pay attention to our (former) ICCA/ICGA officers, namely by reviewing their work (Levy), highlighting their past performances (Marsland and Newborn), and publishing their findings (Schaeffer).

Jaap van den Herik