



THE  
CHAMPIONS'  
GAME

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A TRUE STORY

SAUL RAMIREZ

as told to JOHN SEIDLITZ



RULE 1

## GO BIG OR GO HOME

“*The chessboard is the world, the pieces are the phenomena of the universe, the rules of the game are what we call the laws of Nature. The player on the other side is hidden from us. We know that his play is always fair and patient.*”

- T.H. Huxley, *A Liberal Education*

**O**h God! I thought. *It's happening all over again.* It was like a bad movie. Worse. It was a nightmare. The traffic wasn't budging. I was like a man trying to smile in front of a firing squad.

My cell phone rang. It was Mr. Herrera, in the van in front of me.

“What do we do, bro?” he said, his voice a mixture of amusement and worry.

I glanced in the rearview mirror. The kids in my van were starting to clamor about being late to their first nationals.

I said, “Dude, there's so much traffic...we're going to have to...”

“Bro, we need to get there.”

“I know that, Adrian.”

If you get to the nationals late, they don’t care. If you arrive twenty minutes after the round, you lose the round, period. Plain and simple. No show, no go. And it tumbles like dominos from there, with one forfeiture following another, depending on how fast the games go and how much later you arrive.

I saw a sign up ahead that said DO NOT ENTER - EMERGENCY LANES ONLY.

As a chess champion, player, and coach, I don’t recommend the course of action we were about to take. But, man, sometimes you gotta pivot!

*Go big or go home!*

I watched as Mr. Herrera’s van suddenly shot into the emergency lane.

I muttered to myself, “I don’t know where this guy’s going, but...”

I hit the gas and stayed on his tail.

The kids started whooping, “Come on, Mister! We gotta get there first!”

May as well have been the Indy 500. It was crazy. I don’t know how we did it, but we got there on time. We skidded into the 2015 National Chess Championship. We arrived in style.

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In chess, that most ancient of games, you must make the most of chances that come your way. Always be on the lookout for opportunities that present themselves for you to improve your position on the board (and isn’t life our board?).